



ON THE
RED STAIRCASE

BY M. IMLAY TAYLOR

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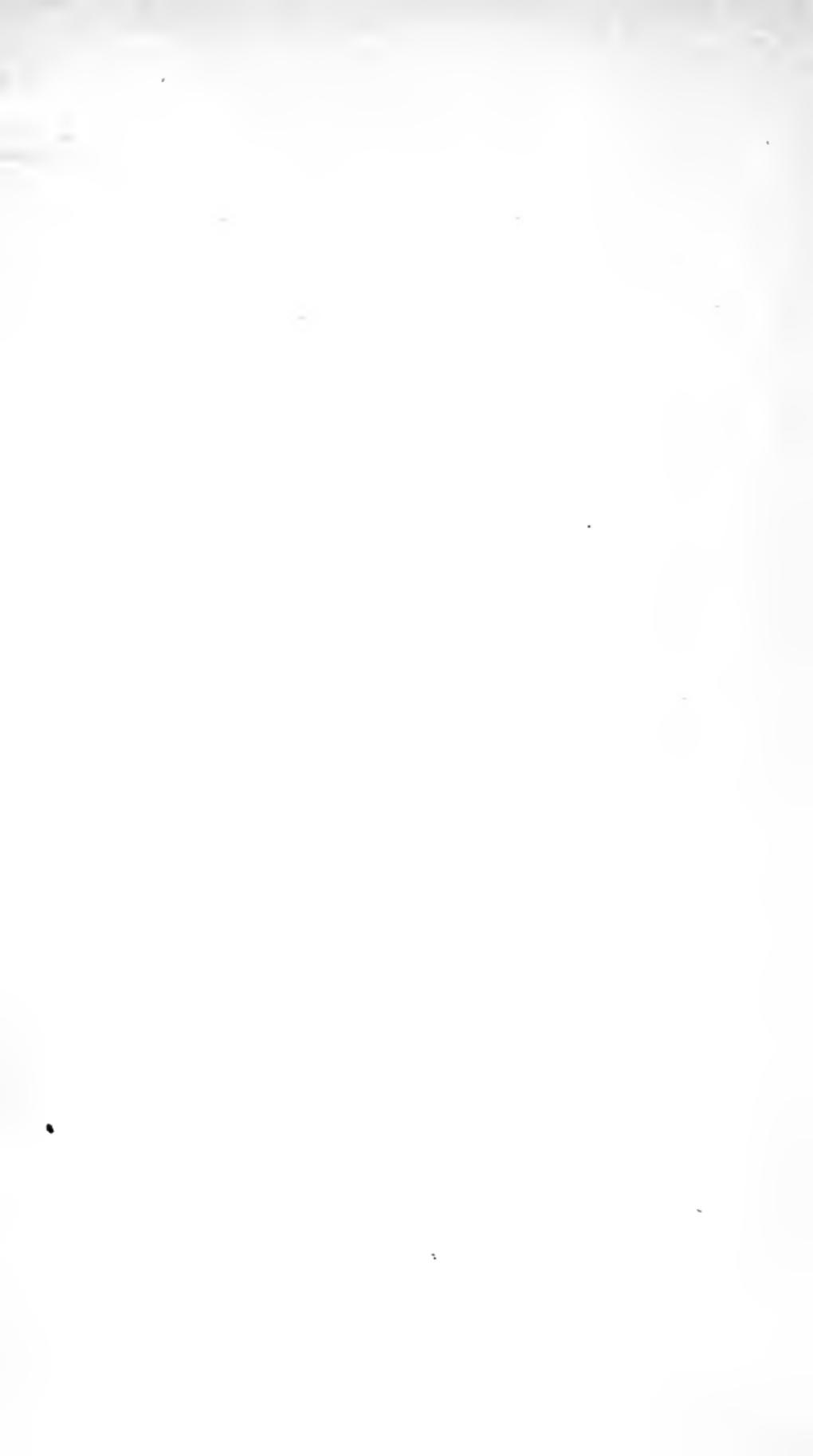
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ON THE RED STAIRCASE





THE KREMLIN.

ON THE RED STAIRCASE

BY

M. IMLAY TAYLOR

SECOND EDITION.



CHICAGO

A. C. McCLURG AND COMPANY

1897

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ON THE RED STAIRCASE.

CHAPTER I.

THE RABBLE ELECT A CZAR.

THE Patriarch Joachim was standing on the balcony, in front of the Church of the Savior, looking down upon the dense mass of people below in the Grand Square of the Kremlin at Moscow. A purpose was pulsing in the keen face, and he was measuring his audience, weighing too, perhaps, the peril and the cost. They were still; every eye was fixed on the tall figure in the magnificent pontificals of the Greek Church; every ear strained to catch his first word. It was the climax of the day, the chief act in the great drama. He raised his hand, with a majestic gesture, over the people.

"Hear ye, voters of the Moscovite State," he cried, in a loud voice, "to which of the two princes do you give the rule?"

For a moment after he ceased speaking, the silence remained unbroken; then a hoarse murmur rose on the outskirts of the crowd, amid the rabble, and rolled on, gaining strength, until it was an articulate shout.

“Peter Alexeivitch! Peter Alexeivitch!”

Yet here and there in the multitude, the first-born was remembered in a shrill cry,—

“Ivan Alexeivitch!”

But the dissenting voices were lost in the volume of sound. The nobles on the balcony were watching the patriarch. There was an expression almost of triumph on his features, as his eyes swept over the shouting throng. Again he held up his hand, and the noisy acclamations subsided, as the waves of the Red Sea before the rod of Moses.

“To which of the two princes do you give the rule?” he repeated, and this time there was the thrill of strong emotion in his voice.

“Peter Alexeivitch! Peter Alexeivitch!”¹

¹ The Czar Alexis was twice married. His first wife, the Princess Marie Miloslavsky, had thirteen children, but several of them died in infancy. The only two boys that survived her were Feodor, who succeeded his father, and Ivan, who was half blind, had an impediment in his speech, and was almost an imbecile. There were six daughters. The second wife of Alexis was Natalia Naryshkin, the daughter of Kirill Naryshkin. She gave birth to a son, who was baptized Peter and who was destined to be the great czar. When the story be-

The lesson was learned, and the shout rose until it echoed from every tower and dome of the Kremlin. The *canaille* was rampant; all the smothered rebellion in the heart of the city was seething there. The discontent of the Streltsi, the old and unhealed sore of the Dissent, the suffering of the serfs,—a hundred impulses and miseries surged in the hearts of the shouters, swayed, for the moment, by political intrigue, answering readily, as the populace will, to the most skillful manipulator.

The patriarch smiled, and stretched out his hands with a gesture of benediction. We who stood a little way across the square, could see by the animation of his entire party, the triumph that it was impossible to veil, even though every demand of prudence and diplomacy required it. The rabble pushed against me so rudely that I stepped aside, my ears deafened by the thundering acclaims,—

“Peter Alexeivitch! Long live the czar! Down with all traitors! The Naryshkins forever!”

gins, Feodor has just died, without heirs, and the patriarch calls to the populace to choose between the half-brothers, Ivan and Peter. The nation was divided into two parties, named after the mothers of the claimants respectively,—the party of the Miloslavskys, who favored Ivan, and the party of the Naryshkins, who favored Peter.

I could not restrain a smile. I had been long enough about the Russian court to know how fierce was the undercurrent, how intense the resentment felt against the family of the dowager czarina.

An old Russian, who had stepped back with me out of the path of the crowd, suddenly addressed me.

"A short-lived triumph!" he muttered, in a gruff tone. "It is one shout to-day, another to-morrow. Here is only the rabble of Moscow!"

I looked at the man in surprise; it required courage to express an opinion in the open air, and to a stranger. He had the bearing of a soldier, and there was an ugly scar on his cheek. His long cloak slipping aside a trifle, I saw the uniform of the Streltsi, and caught my breath; a trivial remark from one of that body might be significant. Russia, at that time, had no army, only a few troops officered by foreigners, and the peasantry brought into service, in time of war, under the command of the feudal chiefs. The Streltsi therefore occupied a peculiar position; they constituted a national guard, consisting of twenty-two regiments, about a thousand men in each regiment, named after their officers, who were always

Russians. The Streltsi had quarters set apart for them, and their own shops, being tradesmen when off duty, and were exempt from taxation. The service was hereditary, a son entering the father's regiment as soon as he was of age. The root of much discontent was the difficulty with their own officers, whom they charged with the misappropriation of a portion of their pay and interference with their civil occupations,—their privilege to trade being especially dear to them. They had always enjoyed such peculiar liberties that they fretted under injustices, some real and some fancied, and all no doubt deeply colored by the bitterness of the political situation, and the fact that their petitions for redress had been treated with contempt before the Czar Feodor's death; but now they were strong enough to be courted by both parties, and I was interested at once in my companion.

"I am a stranger here," I said, purposing to draw him out, "and know little of these matters."

He turned a keen glance on me, seeming to search my face.

"You are a Frenchman," he said, addressing me in excellent French, which was the more astonishing because so unusual, especially in

his rank in life. Without waiting for my reply, he directed my attention to the balcony. "The patriarch is going to bear the glad tidings to the Czarina Natalia," he remarked grimly, "and, I presume, to anoint the young czarevitch¹ with all haste; but it takes more than holy oil to make an emperor in these days."

We were less pressed now, for the crowd was surging away towards the palace, shouting as it went. I examined my new acquaintance with curiosity. If his face had been less rugged and fierce it would have been handsome on the side that had escaped the disfiguring scar. It was a remarkable face: a keen eye, a large straight nose, a strong mouth, and an expression of relentless resolution, — a face that had had a past as dark, as cold, as grim as that close-shut mouth. My curiosity was excited.

"A regent will have to be appointed," I remarked, "during the minority of the czar."

He smiled grimly. "And who do you suppose it will be?" he asked, with a keen glance.

"Custom points to the czarina," I replied with a little hesitation.

"And the Chancellor Matveief," he added.

I assumed surprise.

¹ The czar's son and heir. So also, Alexeivitch is the son of Alexis.

"Matveief is an exile," I exclaimed hastily.

The Russian laughed. "The czarina is his dutiful and indebted ward," he said. "He is no longer in Archangel but at Lukh, and a summons can reach him the easier. When a guardian has set you on a throne, you cannot be ungrateful. Why, man, where are your senses? What is all this shouting about? It is the Naryshkins. I forget, though, you are a foreigner."

"A poor gentleman," I said at once; "a soldier of the king of France."

The Russian's glance was following the crowd; whatever his thoughts, they were not pleasant, for his expression was gloomy and cynical.

"You have witnessed a singular event in our history," he said sternly; "you have seen the Moscovite rabble elect a czar. The younger son setting aside the first-born!"

"The Czarevitch Ivan is said to be indifferent to the high office," I replied, in a low tone; "he is blind."

"Ay, and deformed!" said the Russian, promptly. "Yet will the people of Russia demand the recognition of primogeniture. Court intrigues cannot prevail. What a flimsy pretext was this election! The States-General of

Russia elected Michael Romanof; the Czar Shuisky fell because he was elected by Moscow alone; and this is not the Moscovite State, but the rabble of the city, and the retainers of the boyars!¹ The Miloslavskys are down to-day, but who dares to predict for to-morrow?"

It was indeed a difficult problem, so bitter was the quarrel. The Miloslavskys were the relatives of the first wife of the Czar Alexis, the Naryshkins of his second; and, that day, the latter had succeeded in electing their candidate for the throne, Alexis' youngest son Peter, setting aside Ivan, his half brother, and the only surviving son of Alexis by his first wife, the Princess Marie Miloslavsky.

I was endeavoring to place my companion; that he was well born, I could not doubt; at the same time, he was evidently not an officer. I seemed to have seen his face before, and wondered if he could have been in attendance on Prince Dolgoruky, the Chief of the Department of the Streltsi. The ugly scar, which drew the right side of his face, seemed to make identification infallible; yet, it was that scar that baffled me, for I could not remember having

¹ An aristocratic order, next to the ruling princes. They held the highest military and civil offices. The title "boyar" was bestowed by the czar, and was not hereditary.

seen it before. We were moving along now, and I did not care for his company, but did not like to shake him off too abruptly; he walked close beside me, whether unconsciously or not, I could not be sure. The Grand Square was still densely crowded, and the rabble kept up a continuous uproar. All around us, there were still prolonged shouts for Peter Alexeivitch, and here and there, there were rough-and-tumble fights in progress, due undoubtedly to the reviving sentiment of opposition. I noticed but few boyars threading their way through the mob; for days I had remarked a certain timidity on their part, an avoidance of the crowd. I had no doubt, in my own mind, that the trouble in the Department of the Streltsi was more serious than any one was willing to admit, and it was difficult to estimate the result of to-day's *coup d'état*. Partisans and opponents alike were aware of the strong sentiment among the rank and file of the Streltsi in favor of the blind czarevitch, or rather of the great Czarevna Sophia Alexeievna,¹ and of their lukewarm

¹ Sophia, daughter of the Czar Alexis. All the daughters of the emperor except Sophia received only a rudimentary education, according to the old Russian custom; but for some reason she was allowed to share the studies of her brother Feodor. It is possible that the czar feared the failure of heirs male, and selected Sophia, as the most able of his daughters, to be

attachment to the child Peter, who had just been so irregularly elected. I could not avoid some speculation, little as the matter seemed then to concern me. I confess that I was moved by a sentiment of gallantry to lean towards the cause of the Czarina Natalia. Her comparative youth, her beauty, and the peril of her situation appealed to me, and I felt, with some regret, that her party scarcely estimated the real strength of her opponents. I sympathized with the young and ambitious mother fighting for the rights of her son, hemmed in as she was by court intrigue and malice, and pitted against a mind that, in diplomacy and subtlety, far surpassed her own; for we were all beginning to realize that the Czarevna Sophia was a power that it was difficult to estimate.

I was half-way across the square now, and trained for a not improbable elevation. The Empress Natalia had been educated in the house of the Chancellor Matveief, who was married to a Scotch lady; she was thus unaccustomed to the old Russian rules of seclusion and ignorance; and the introduction of her western ideas and customs into the imperial palace gave great offense to Sophia. Very soon this kindled a feud between the Naryshkins and the Miloslavskys, which grew more bitter when Alexis showered favors on his young wife and her brothers. Sophia began intriguing with the Streltsi, or National Guards, and ultimately gained them over, all but one regiment. These troops virtually composed the army of Russia, for the empire was then without military organization.

my unsolicited companion continued to trail along at my heels. I was just making up my mind to be rid of the fellow, when we found our path obstructed by a dense mass of people, congregated about two Russians who were grappling each other in a fierce hand-to-hand battle. The crowd pushing us aside, I was turning away, when my companion uttered a cry, and leaping into the mass of humanity, pushed his way through, and threw himself upon the combatants. I was caught in the throng and thrust to the front of the ring, an unwilling witness of the hostilities. My unknown companion had seized one of the combatants around the waist and was dragging him off the other, by main force, while the bystanders shouted for fair play. It was evident that the quarrel was purely personal, and that the rabble were merely interested in it as a kind of diversion, and not a little disappointed when my acquaintance succeeded in separating them. Keeping his grip on the smaller of the two men, he told the other to be off before he was thrashed into eternity. The fellow addressed, who looked like some boyar's retainer, was only too glad to sneak off through the jeering crowd, for he had been badly whipped. The other man allowed himself to be jerked along by the collar, sub-

missive enough in the stranger's relentless grip. He was a small man to have been so puissant, and I saw that he was a little misshapen, one shoulder being very high, and his thin, pale face was ill-favored. The bystanders began to laugh as they saw how meekly he submitted to the authority of the tall, hard-featured man who had seized him.

"Oh, come!" cried one of the rascals, "what is this new meekness? You fought well, but you can't keep your head up now!"

"Let go of him, master!" shouted another; "it is a shame to spoil our pastime."

Without heeding, the stranger forced his way among them, dragging along his captive, and only bestowing a scornful glance on the populace. I was more than ever struck with his air of authority, and saw that these men all gave way to him, — a tacit recognition of his commanding mien, for a less determined man could never have broken up that quarrel and dispersed the crowd. My interest was sufficiently roused to make me forget my anxiety to be rid of him, and as he pushed along with the crestfallen victor, I joined him. As we proceeded, part of the rabble followed, evidently actuated by idle curiosity.

"Let us move faster," I remarked to the

stranger; "now that the election is over, the crowd is breaking away, and we shall presently have the *canaille* at our heels."

He looked at me scornfully, I thought, but still mended his pace; and as we were now a little away from the mob, he took his hand off the other's collar, addressing him sharply.

"You fool!" he said, in his grim way. "You will spoil all with your absurd brawls. Can't you see that villain's cook in the highway without thrashing him, and forthwith drawing the notice of all the tale-bearers and spies in Moscow?"

"I beg your excellency's pardon," stammered the man, shamefaced, "but it was that carrion Polotsky, and I would rather die than not beat him!"

"Ay!" retorted the other, grimly, "you should have cut his throat long ago; but, as it is, he is the worst one you could have selected for a street brawl. You are an ass, Michael Gregorievitch, and will not only hang yourself, but your master if you can find enough rope!"

The other man glanced at me obliquely out of his narrow eyes, and his master, noting the look and the interrogation in his face, smiled.

"A friend," he said, and added something in

an undertone which escaped me; but I saw his servant's eyes fasten curiously upon me.

We were approaching the Cathedral of the Assumption, and although a few paces in advance, were still closely followed by a train of curious people. The stranger had drawn his sword when he rushed into the fight, and was still carrying the naked blade in his hand, and his dress being disordered, displayed his uniform. As we approached the cathedral, he seemed to divine my intention of lingering in that vicinity, and pausing, extended his hand with a gesture at once dignified and gracious.

"M. de Brousson," he said, startling me with my own name, "I believe we part here. I thank you for your company across the square, and if, in the future, you need me, I am Peter Lykof."

"I am evidently better known to you than I supposed," I replied as courteously as my astonishment would permit, and conscious of an immediate doubt that I heard the unknown's true name; "and I am equally beholden for monsieur's society on this troubled day."

Lykof waved his hand, as if dismissing further exchange of courtesies, and passed on with the rabble at his heels, while I at once fell into insignificance without him.

As I stood there, marveling at the stranger's knowledge of my identity, I looked up, and beheld the face that had haunted my memory for weeks and shone like a pale flower out of the dark background of passion and intrigue.

CHAPTER II.

MADEMOISELLE'S GLOVE.

SHE had just come out of the Cathedral of the Assumption, and was standing beside the proud old boyar, whom I supposed to be her father. Her veil had slipped aside, and once more I saw her features plainly, though this time she was oblivious of my presence. She was beautiful. There was no longer any doubt; before, I had thought that it might be half my fancy, half the dim light within the cathedral; but now, in the broad sunlight, I saw the regularity of her small features, the exquisite fairness of her complexion, the beautiful blue of her eyes. I saw too that she had been weeping, and was pale. My heart throbbed with a sudden mad impulse to offer her my sword, as her knight-errant. Fortunately, prudence and the common conventionalities of life kept me still, but I eagerly watched her every move-

ment. Her hand rested half reluctantly, I thought, upon the arm of her escort, and she seemed to shrink away from the noise and rush of the crowd that was streaming past the cathedral, roaring and bellowing upon the way. The old boyar, her protector, glanced at them with complacent condescension, and from that moment I never doubted his adherence to the Naryshkins. I could see that he was measuring the extent of their success, gloating, perhaps, over the defeat of their opponents; there was something in the man's face that suggested a keen relish for such a triumph. He was the personification of the old-time Russian boyar, the adherent of Precedence, the tyrant of the serf, the aggressive autocrat. He stood there, in the shadow of the cathedral, and viewed the Moscow rabble with the reflection of the patriarch's triumph on his face. Such men as these would never make the Czarevitch Peter's cause popular with the masses, never pacify the wounded sensibilities of the Dissenters, or heal the troubles of the Streltsi. The old noble was the picture of combativeness and aggression, and there was, too, a sinister expression in his eyes. His brows were intensely black in contrast to his gray hair, and instead of curving with the socket of the eye, they pointed

suddenly up at the ends, like two horns, giving at once a Satanic aspect to the Tartar face, with its olive skin and its thin, pale lips.

Nothing could have been more complete than the contrast between the two, the old man and the girl: a hawk and a dove. So intent was he upon the scene before them, that he seemed to forget her, and she shrank back in the shelter of his large figure and gazed timidly about. It was then that I had the satisfaction to find that I was remembered. I moved a little nearer to them, and as I did so, she turned, and our eyes met. There was a flash of recognition, and, I dared to think, almost of pleasure in her glance, but she instantly turned her head and gazed in the opposite direction; still, I rejoiced to see a beautiful blush creep slowly up to her brow, and suffuse her face, until even her delicate ear was scarlet. She remembered me, then, but did she resent my audacity? I was never a man to be easily dashed, but I knew that Russian etiquette was even more rigid than our own, and caution was a necessity. A bolder man would have hesitated to encounter that proud old boyar!

She stood there with averted face, pulling nervously at her gloves, and presently she had one off, and I saw a small and beautiful hand.

Suddenly she adjusted her veil more closely, and I feared that my persistent gaze had given offense, until I discovered the cause of her movement. An acquaintance of the boyar's had approached, and I was startled at recognizing no less a person than Viatscheslav Naryshkin, a cousin of the Czarina Natalia, and a man whom I had learned to despise as a court profligate, full of intrigue and malice of a common kind, and holding his place only because of his illustrious relative; yet managing to exert considerable influence in that inner circle which constituted the strength of the czarina's party, which to-day's election would elevate to a dizzy eminence, if they were equal to discerning and grasping their opportunities.

The boyar welcomed Naryshkin with effusion, but I saw that his fair companion seemed to shrink yet farther into the background, and I rejoiced at the maiden's discernment. It is said that every woman is endowed with an instinct that warns her against such men, and in this case it seemed true. Naryshkin, however, was nothing dashed by her manner, probably attributing it to maiden coyness, and forced himself upon her notice in a way which made me grind my teeth; but I was compelled to swallow my displeasure and play the *rôle* of a

bystander at the little drama. It did not take me long to draw some natural conclusions, especially as I saw that the boyar evidently favored the would-be suitor, and was as eager to welcome his advances as the young girl was to repulse them. I was more than ever determined to learn something about the identity of the two, and the probable fate in store for the possessor of that beautiful face. When they moved away through the crowd I followed, as I had followed before, and saw them assisted into their carriage by Naryshkin. As she stepped into it she turned and looked back, and it seemed to me that, even through her veil, I saw her eyes; something fell from her hand and fluttered to the ground, unnoticed by her ill-favored suitor. As the carriage drove slowly off, I pressed forward and found a glove. Her glove! A man was standing near me and I questioned him. Yes, he knew whose carriage it was. That old gentleman was the Boyar Vladimir Ramodanofsky, and I gathered from the fellow's manner that the name was not popular with the masses. I had gained something; knowing his name, I could soon learn more of him; already I knew a little, by reputation, of the stern old nobleman who had once commanded the insubordinate Streltsi.

Meanwhile, her glove lay in the palm of my hand. Such a little glove; of the kind worn by the ladies in Paris, and it seemed to retain yet the round shape of her small hand, to be a part of her personality. Had she dropped it purposely? I dared not think so; but I thrust it into my bosom and walked on swiftly in the track of the carriage. I was resolved this time to know more about her. The crowd was thinning out, and I made my way easily to the Gate of the Redeemer, keeping the carriage in view, for it was moving slowly. I was congratulating myself on having escaped my strange acquaintance and being at liberty to pursue my own inclination, but I was destined to meet with another obstacle to the accomplishment of my errand. Just as I was about to leave the Kremlin, I encountered Dr. Daniel von Gaden, the Jewish physician of the late Czar Feodor. He stopped me to ask some particulars of the occurrences in the Grand Square. He was a learned man, and had, too, a thorough knowledge of the intrigues at court. His face today was pale and grave.

"These are troublous times," he said thoughtfully, "and an honest man scarcely knows to which strong arm to look for shelter. It is an evil hour to place a child on the throne.

The czarina's party is not strong enough without the adherence of the Streltsi, and that is a difficult matter. Besides, there is no leader there but Matveief, and he—they accuse him of witchcraft!" Von Gaden laughed. "It is not well to study algebra in Russia."

"No," I said, "learning is at a discount. I marvel, monsieur, that they do not accuse you of the black arts."

"They do worse in their hearts, M. le Vicomte," he answered gravely; "they accuse me of poisoning the late czar."

I started. The announcement, made with such composure, astonished me. For the moment I forgot the carriage and my interrupted adventure. He saw my amazement, and smiled sadly.

"Not openly," he said; "the accusations are whispered where an honest man may not refute them; but you know such whispering sent the chancellor to a remote corner of Archangel, and what may be the fate of an obscure Jewish doctor?"

He looked at me with an expression of gloomy interrogation. I have often thought since that his awful fate was already casting its black shadow over his soul; that he was gifted with prescience.

"Natalia is your friend, is she not?" I ventured mildly, feeling that any remark was worse than useless.

"Ay," he said at once; "the gracious czarina is my friend, but what power has she here?"

His eye swept over the Kremlin, and I knew that his mind was conjuring up a thousand pictures of the dark deeds that made up its secret annals. Before he spoke again, I looked at the gate and saw a hideous little figure rushing towards us, whirling its arms above its large head, and uttering a shrill sound between a squeal and a whistle. Von Gaden, awaking from his reverie, eyed the new-comer with little favor.

"It is Homyak, one of the court dwarfs," he remarked calmly, "and he is evidently badly frightened."

The little creature threw himself upon the doctor, grasping his mantle in his talon-like fingers and raising a white drawn face.

"I have seen the dead!" he moaned, cowering down until he was the picture of abject terror. "I have seen the dead!"

Von Gaden shook his mantle free with an impatient gesture.

"You are evidently troubled with a bad con-

science, Homyak," he said cynically, "therefore your graveyard visitants are frequent!"

The dwarf covered his wizened face with his hands, and rocked to and fro in an ecstasy of fear. I could not help a feeling of pity as well as disgust as I beheld him.

"What was your vision this time?" the Jew asked, with relentless contempt.

The dwarf stopped his exhibition of terror, and going close to the physician, tried to raise his hideous face to his interrogator's.

"It was he!" he whispered in a tone just audible to me. "He, whom you tried to save on the Red Staircase, and who lay dying that night on the stone pavement of his own courtyard!"

Von Gaden started. "'T is strange!" he muttered; "I was thinking of him a moment since. Her young face brought back the memory of that awful scene. And you have seen him, fellow?"

He regarded the dwarf with a look of fierce interrogation, as if to read his very soul; but Homyak showed no desire to conceal anything; he was shaking with genuine terror.

"I saw his spirit," he said, his teeth chattering, "and there was the scar — the wound you sewed up. I saw him, and he mocked me!"

"Where was he?" asked the physician, while I marveled at his patience with the dwarf's vagaries.

"He came from this direction," said Hom-yak, wildly, "and he was gaunt and thin, and his hair was white."

Von Gaden laughed. "You dream, Hom-yak," he said; "ghosts do not age."

I was growing impatient, and made a movement to leave them; but Von Gaden laid his hand on my arm.

"A moment, M. de Brousson," he said; and then he took the dwarf aside, and speaking to him sternly and briefly, dispatched him in the direction of the palace. When he rejoined me I saw that the gloom on his face had deepened rather than disappeared.

"If you can walk home with me, M. le Vicomte," he said gravely, "I would gladly talk a little with you. These are uncertain times, and a man must needs keep his house in order and his affairs ready, lest he be unexpectedly taken away. There is a matter that has often weighed upon my mind that I would gladly confide to a disinterested man who could bear witness in the hour of need."

Now, I was on the horns of a dilemma. The doctor had been more than obliging to me when

I lay sore smitten with fever, and I could not easily deny him, yet I was fretting to be off on my errand. However, I resigned myself to the circumstances, and with some reluctance turned to accompany him. Then a sudden thought prompted me to question my companion.

"Can you tell me anything," I said, "of the Boyar Vladimir Ramodanofsky?"

Von Gaden started and looked at me sharply.

"Verily," he said, beneath his breath, "Homyak is right; the dead walk!"

CHAPTER III.

THE STORY OF CAIN.

AFTER a moment's thought the physician walked on, motioning to me to follow him.

"This is no place for private converse," he said; "when we are in my house, I can answer you. It was of the Boyar Ramodanofsky I was about to speak, and your question startled me; but mayhap it was accidental. At any rate, follow me, and I will endeavor to satisfy your curiosity."

I was content to follow, since I was assured of hearing something of the boyar and his beautiful charge. I did not doubt Von Gaden's knowledge of them; his profession gained him universal admittance, and he had been a physician of the czar's, which was an endorsement readily accepted by the nobility.

The streets outside the Kremlin were packed with people; the crowd within had dispersed, and Biélui-gorod was filled with the overflow.

I noticed more than once that curious and, I fancied, suspicious glances were cast at the physician, as we walked rapidly along; but he was apparently unconscious of them, although his keen eye was ever so observant. Here and there were knots of soldiers talking eagerly together; and at one corner we witnessed a curious example of the smoldering ire of the Streltsi against their own commanders. An officer of the Pyzhof regiment was riding towards the Kremlin, evidently on an errand of importance. As he came abreast of us, a woman hissed him, and a cry rose suddenly, as if at a preconcerted signal, —

“Down with the officers! Down with oppression and extortion! Give us our pay!” And the stones flew like hail.

The officer, a young fellow, taken unawares, was evidently alarmed, and dashed off through the crowd without offering any remonstrance, his retreat bringing laughter and jeers from the mob. Von Gaden quickened his step, saying to me in a low tone: —

“It is an evil sign; the insubordination has reached serious proportions, and there is no master hand upon the rein. We have had two benevolent rulers, — his late majesty, and the Czar Alexis; we need now another, Ivan the

Terrible. The rabble is breaking its bonds, and woe to Russia's rulers when the reckoning day comes!"

"You see it, then, as plainly as I do?" I said. "This election to-day seemed idle mockery; they have set up a boy to rule the Russias, and they can't control the rabble of Moscow!"

"No one can foresee the end," Von Gaden replied gravely; "the feuds are so bitter that every man feels his life to be in peril. The Naryshkins and their adherents all wore armor under their robes to-day. The patriarch turned from the side of the dead czar to ask the boyars who should rule over them, and they referred him to the free voters of the Moscovite State!"

"Le roi est mort, vive le roi!" I said dryly.

"Ay, it is ever so!" replied Von Gaden.

We had reached his home, and he ushered me in with that gentle courtesy which was one of his characteristics.

"I will take you up to my den," he said, smiling. "I would talk freely to you, and there we can be undisturbed."

He led me up a spiral stair, and opening a low door at the top, we entered a long, narrow room directly under the roof, and lighted only by a huge skylight. As I glanced about me, I

realized that the place would furnish an admirable pretext for an accusation of familiarity with the black arts, far more plausible too than the one preferred against the book of algebra belonging to Matveief's son. The room was bare of all luxury, furnished only in the plainest and most meager fashion, and fitted up for a laboratory. The skylight illumined the center of the apartment, leaving the corners gloomy; and out of the shadows, here and there, grinned a whitened skull, and there were various other fragments of the human anatomy about the place. The doctor's instruments, keen and polished, were in evidence, and heavy volumes of science were piled from floor to roof, in ponderous stacks. There were many phials filled with various colored fluids, and a keen aromatic odor issued from a black kettle simmering over the fire, suspended on a hook and chain from the brick arch above the hearth. It was the very spot in which to conjure up a familiar spirit, and there was something of the same mystery and interest about the dignified figure of the Hebrew. His keen eye divined my thoughts.

"You see the palpable evidence of my nefarious schemes, M. le Vicomte," he said, smiling. "Here is the place to brew a poison

for a czar. Alas! there is no foe so dangerous as ignorant superstition, and the average Russian of to-day is even more superstitious than the rest of the world. There is one man in that court, though, who is in advance of his times; one man who is equal to taking the helm, though the last one likely to be called, if the election of to-day hold."

I glanced at him interrogatively; I always liked to hear Von Gaden's opinions. He continued at once, —

"I mean Prince Basil Galitsyn," he said; "he is still a young man, but a born leader."

"All his attachment is for the Miloslavsky party though," I replied.

"Ay, he is for the Miloslavskys. In fact, there is a strong friendship between him and the Czarevna Sophia; for all that, he may yet be called to the helm, for who knows what will come?"

"You know the young czar," I said; "what do you think of him?"

"Peter Alexeivitch is still a child," Von Gaden replied slowly; "but I have observed him closely, for in him, I know, we see Russia's future ruler, whoever reigns during his minority. His succession seems beyond dispute, in the long run. He is neither like his

amiable father, Alexis, nor like the late czar, Feodor. He is a young barbarian,—fierce, cruel, daring. The boy is different from other boys. I think that Russia has much to fear, and more to hope, from that young Tartar."

I laughed. "It is well that these walls are without ears," I said, "else what treason would this sound in Moscow!"

"Ay, treason, always treason!" returned Von Gaden, bitterly. "If I cure the czar, I am a magician; if I fail to cure him, I am a poisoner. It is, therefore, only a choice of evils."

He stooped down and stirred the fire, the red light glowing on his features. I had put aside my cloak and was standing watching him. He laid down the poker and looked up.

"Be seated," he said, courteously, signing to me to take the only chair in the room, while he sat down opposite, on a crooked-legged stool. "I dare say you think I have forgotten Ramodanofsky, but I have not. It is an evil story, and I have never told it; but it is borne in upon me that I may not have long to live, and I do not care to die with that secret in my bosom,—although I have many others," he added, smiling. He was leaning a little forward, his clasped hands resting heavily on

his knees, his back being to the light, and only the red glow of the fire illuminating his features.

"Your profession makes you a natural repository of secrets," I replied. "My own nature is too careless for such a work as yours; I should bungle both with my patients and their confidences."

"It might be far otherwise if you had been trained to tend the ill and the dying, M. de Brousson," he rejoined quietly. "Every profession molds its neophytes. You have been taught to put people out of the world, I to help to keep them in it."

"The nobler work," I said courteously, although I had no thought of drawing a comparison between my sword and his lance.

"I thank you," Von Gaden answered dryly; "but I know well what you of noble blood think of the surgeons who sew up the slashes made by your blades. But no matter. I am moved to tell you the story of Ramodanofsky. I will recount the whole affair; part of it — the last part — from my own experience, the rest I have gathered sometimes by inquiry, sometimes by accident. There were two brothers of the name, the elder Feodor, and the younger Vladimir, whom you have seen, both old men now,

if both had lived. They were of different mothers. Feodor was the son of a Polish woman, the old boyar's first wife; Vladimir is pure Russian, or Tartar, which you please. Feodor was the favorite, and inherited the estates and the wealth, while Vladimir came off but poorly. The two men hated each other; the tie of a common fatherhood never bound them; yet I believe that the Boyar Feodor Ramodanofsky was just to his half-brother, who was, in a way, dependent upon him; but you can imagine how the father's discrimination in favor of the elder rankled with a man like Vladimir. Feodor went to France at one time, and while there, married a beautiful young Frenchwoman, of noble family, and connected, I believe, on her mother's side with the Polish mother of Feodor. He brought home his bride, and in a year or so a child was born to them, to their great disappointment not a boy, but a girl. Vladimir was then serving in the army, fighting the Don Cossacks, at the time of Stenka Razin's insurrection, for it was during the reign of Alexis the Debonair. When he returned, he was poorer and more reckless than ever. Whether he loved Feodor's wife or not, it is hard to tell, but he began to make love to her whenever his brother was absent. Marie

Ramodanofsky was a noble woman, I knew her; her daughter has inherited her beauty, along with her father's spirit. She resented Vladimir's treachery, but she dreaded to tell her husband, who was a passionate and jealous man, and who hated his brother for a hundred evil traits that he knew, without adding this one. But at last her position became unendurable, and she told her husband. There is no doubt that a bitter scene ensued, and the boyar, in the first flush of his anger and jealousy, must have falsely accused her of encouraging his brother; when he left her to go in search of the traitor, her attendants found her in a death-like swoon. Meanwhile, Feodor followed Vladimir to the Kremlin, and finding him on the Red Staircase, a fight ensued. Feodor was the more powerful man of the two, but he was blind with rage, and it is said that Homyak, the court dwarf, who was patronized by Vladimir, seeing the fight going against the latter, tripped up the elder brother, and he fell from the top to the bottom of the Red Staircase, the blood flowing from a gash in his cheek. I was in the palace, attending the Czarevna Sophia, and was summoned to the wounded man. Vladimir had disappeared, and Homyak gave a garbled version of the fight. It had reached the ears of

the czar, and Alexis was not a little angered; already I think his mind was poisoned by the tales that later ruined Feodor, for soon after this he lost favor, and it was bruited about that he was a traitor to the czar. It was fifteen months afterwards when I was summoned to take care of Madame Ramodanofsky; she died when her little son was born. The boy lived only two days, and they were buried together. Feodor felt his loss bitterly; he was then under a heavy cloud, and threatened, I knew, with exile; for I have known most of the secrets of the court for many years. No man seemed to be able to lay his finger on the boyar's accuser, but I never doubted that it was Vladimir.

"It was the week after the wife and baby died that I was entering the courtyard of Ramodanofsky's house. Homyak was just ahead of me; he seemed to be Feodor's evil genius. There was quite a little crowd in the court; all the serfs were there, and in the center of the place, in a pool of blood, lay Feodor, stricken down by the hand of an unknown assassin, so they said. He was not dead, and I had him carried into the house, and bound up his wounds; I thought he would live, but I was not positive, and had to leave him still in a state of semi-consciousness. As I

crossed the courtyard, Homyak plucked at my cloak. I have always hated the grinning creature, and made a motion to shake him off. ‘How is the boyar?’ he asked eagerly; ‘He will live,’ I retorted curtly. The dwarf laughed. ‘Vladimir Sergheievitch is not as good a swordsman as I thought,’ he said. ‘It was that villain, then?’ I exclaimed too eagerly, for Homyak took alarm, and rambled off into one of his fanciful tales of which one can make nothing. The next day, before I could see my patient, Vladimir Sergheievitch Ramodanofsky appeared at the palace to announce the death of his brother, and was closeted with the czar. I never saw even the corpse of Feodor. I protested as openly as I dared against the foul play that, I was sure, was taking place, but there was no room for complaints. Vladimir’s tongue is oiled, and he had the ear of the council; he laid before them certain treasonable papers purporting to be his brother’s, and the upshot was, that the dead boyar’s memory was an ill savor in the nostrils of the court, and his honors and emoluments went to Vladimir. If Feodor Sergheievitch had lived, he would have been sent into exile. His little daughter was turned over to the guardianship of the fiend who had endeavored to ruin her

mother and had murdered her father. The child, fortunately, was ignorant of it all, and has grown up in her uncle's household; and as he has no children, will probably inherit her own, in the end. She is rich even now, for the czar had the justice to see that she was not robbed of all her patrimony."

I had listened with keen interest, because I foresaw the end of the story.

"This Boyar Ramodanofsky, then, has no children?" I said. "And the young lady with him?"

"Is Zénaïde Feodorovna Ramodanofsky," returned Von Gaden. "She has inherited her mother's beauty, and is more French than Russian."

"Is it possible that she can be either happy or safe in such guardianship?" I asked, my mind full of the pale and tearful face in front of the Cathedral of the Assumption.

Von Gaden shook his head thoughtfully.

"It is impossible to read the riddle of Vladimir's conduct towards her," he said. "If I thought the man had a conscience, I should say it was troubled with remorse, for he has always seemed just in his treatment of his niece. You know the Russian household is peculiar, but it is more liberal than in the days when the 'Domos-

tróí¹ was composed, and the Ramodanofsky home had been Polish in aspect since the days of Feodor's mother, and his wife had made it French. Zénaïde has been far better educated than the average Russian girl, and has had a Frenchwoman with her for many years; so she speaks Polish and French as readily as Russian. Until lately, there has been apparent accord between the uncle and niece; but now that the boyar is anxious to arrange a marriage for her, I hear that she has developed her father's spirit, and is likely to resist her uncle's authority, as no other Russian girl would dare to do. A young maid is an ill thing to guide!" Von Gaden added, with a smile.

"I honor her for her resistance, since I believe I know the chosen bridegroom;" and I told the Jew of the scene in the Kremlin.

"Viatscheslav Naryshkin?" said the physician, thoughtfully. "Yes, it may be so. Ramodanofsky is a close adherent of the Naryshkins. I think the Czarevna Sophia either knows or suspects something ill of him. You know she was much with the late czar, and learned all the little intrigues that had been handed down from her father's court to that of

¹ A manual of household economy of the time of Ivan the Terrible.

Feodor. Viatscheslav is indeed an evil fate for a pure young girl like Zénaïde Feodorovna."

The fire was dying down, and we both sat staring at the embers, Von Gaden shading his face with his hand.

"I have always wanted to set it right," he said musingly; "I have always intended to do something. If I die now, the secret will not die with me."

"Was it of Feodor Ramodanofsky that Homyak spoke to-day?" I asked, suddenly remembering the conversation:

The physician nodded.

"I do not know what Homyak had to do with it," he said, "but he has an evil conscience; some day he will confess."

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHADOWS ON THE WALL.

BEFORE I left Von Gaden, I had learned the exact locality of Ramodanofsky's house. I scarcely knew what design was forming in my mind; but my love of adventure was keen, and the story I had just heard affected me deeply. If I was half in love before with the beautiful stranger, I was now wholly so with the young orphan, whose peculiar circumstances appealed to the romance in my nature. If I had ever considered obstacles or difficulties, I should not have allowed myself such a day-dream; but I was resolved upon gaining a closer acquaintance with the Ramodanofskys, and I did not count the cost.

The shadows of the early Russian twilight had gathered when I went out, and it was strangely quiet after the tumult of the day, and yet the very air seemed to be portentous; the grim-faced houses looked as if they were lock-

ing some dark secret in their bosoms; and now and then a lurking figure started from the shadow of the wall and scurried into a softly opened door. As I walked on, my own footsteps startled an echo in the silence; and it was almost a shock to hear, far off, the sudden roll of a drum, a sound which came and died away as quickly, leaving behind a greater quietude. I had no love for the city—I was a Frenchman to the core; yet there was something about Moscow on that night that impressed me more deeply than any city in which I had ever so-journed. There was a solemnity, a desolation which seemed to speak of the miseries and sins of the suffering masses. I had been but lately at Versailles, in the midst of the splendors of the Grand Monarque's brilliant court, and here was a wondrous contrast: here, too, was an absolute monarchy, but without the master hand, the iron grip that keeps the helm of state. Here was a court whose ceremonial was as stately as any in the world; but how strong was the feeling of instability! I looked at the Kremlin; within it lay the dead Feodor, not yet buried, and within it, too, was the young czar,—a child, and a tool as yet in the hands of an intriguing party. I had known the Czar Feodor, and had been a recipient of his kind-

ness; and I knew all the prominent figures in the drama of to-day, — it had been a drama to me, and I had not dreamed, and did not dream that night, of the part I was to play in that great tragedy, which was approaching swiftly, silently, malignantly, along the dark streets and in the hidden quarters of the city.

As I reached the neighborhood of the Ramodanofsky house, I noticed that I was no longer solitary. A man was walking along ahead of me, and something in his figure seemed familiar; still, I slackened my pace, having no desire for company. He was evidently observant of my movements, and as little inclined to sociability as I. He kept in the shadow on the other side of the street, and something in his manner of lurking made me loosen my sword in the scabbard and feel for my pistols.

The house of the Boyar Ramodanofsky was now close at hand, and I looked curiously at the dark and forbidding mass of masonry; it appeared as unapproachable as a fortress, although the gate of the courtyard was open, and there were lights in the windows. Observing my companion upon the street, I saw that he had crossed to the other side, and was keeping well in the shadow. It was evident that I could not reconnoiter outside without being

spied upon, so I determined upon a bold course, and entered the courtyard. Finding it vacant, and being now out of sight of the man in the street, I walked cautiously around to the side of the house, observing it narrowly. Von Gaden's story had awakened the keenest interest in my mind, and I could not avoid the thought of the boyar lying in his blood in that very courtyard, across which his daughter's feet passed every day, going and returning in the house of her father's assassin. It was a hideous incongruity. I walked along cautiously, observing the house on the side where I was; the windows were too high from the ground for me to look in, and there was no door in the main building, but there was a low postern in the wing; however, that portion of the house was so quiet that I concluded that it must be the *Terem*, the part allotted to the women, in accordance with the eastern custom, still to a great extent prevalent in Russia. The main building was quiet too, although there were many lights, and some of the windows cast a perfect square of illumination on the wall opposite, so that an occasional shadow of some one passing before the light within was sharply defined on the wall beyond. I soon decided which were the rooms occupied by the boyar

himself, and my attention was concentrated upon those. My occupation seemed likely to be fruitless enough, and yet I lingered, held either by fate, or the sense of the propinquity of Zénaïde Ramodanofsky. While I was loitering there, the sound of voices from a window, a little over my head, attracted my notice, and looking about for a way to see into the room, I discovered an irregularity in the masonry, which furnished a precarious foothold; and being an expert climber, I lifted myself up until my eyes were just above the level of the sill. For a moment the light within dazzled me; then becoming accustomed to it, I saw a large square apartment furnished with a luxury far more French than Russian, and at a table sat the Boyar Vladimir Ramodanofsky, Viatscheslav Naryshkin, and a tall man, whom I recognized as one of the unpopular colonels of the Streltsi, although his name was unknown to me. The three worthies were drinking *vodka*, and Viatscheslav was already a little under its influence. The table was across the room from the window, and though I heard the voices plainly enough, they spoke too low for me to catch more than an occasional word; but I gathered that the discourse was political, and was on the question of the possible adherence of

the Streltsi to Peter's party, — a sore point, and one which was uppermost in every mind on that momentous night. The colonel had a swaggering confidence in the ability of Prince Dolgoruky and the officers to pacify the troops, which was not reflected in the keen face of Vladimir; I saw the contemptuous attention that he bestowed upon his visitor, probably estimating readily the amount of blustering importance that was assumed on account of the presence of the czar's cousin. Viatscheslav himself was taking far less interest in the dispute than he was in his *vodka* and caviare; I knew him to be a *gourmand*, and watched his performance with scornful amusement; here was a suitor who could, at least, do justice to the refreshments.

After a while, the boyar brought the dispute to a close, and the officer, evidently feeling that his company was superfluous, withdrew, leaving Naryshkin still hugging his cup of *vodka*. But as soon as Viatscheslav found himself alone with the boyar, I saw that the conversation was immediately becoming more personal, and they got their heads together over the table. It seemed to me that Ramodanofsky felt some contempt for his guest, although he treated him with marked courtesy. After a little, it became

evident that Naryshkin was asking to see Zénaïde, and the boyar, summoning an attendant, sent him in quest of his niece. In spite of my difficult and precarious position, my interest was now so keen that I would not have quitted my place but to save my life. The servant's face showed at once that he did not relish his errand, and after a prolonged absence, he returned with a message that Mademoiselle Zénaïde would see no one at that hour. The boyar looked like a thunder-cloud, but making a brief apology to Viatscheslav, he left the room to fetch his niece himself.

I looked narrowly at the house to see if I could ascertain which window belonged to the young girl. A bright light from one in the wing shone full on the wall opposite, and presently, on that square of illumination, I saw outlined distinctly the shadow of a woman's figure. Convinced at once that it was Zénaïde's shadow, I watched it with a kind of fascination; at first she stood alone, and by her pose and gesture seemed to be talking to some one, talking with excitement, and making occasionally a vehement gesture. Then on the bright square was cast another silhouette, that of a man, — of Ramodanofsky; he, too, was making gestures even more vehement than hers; at first, he

seemed to plead with and then went on to threaten her. I could read the whole scene in that dumb shadow-show upon the wall. Suddenly he struck her, and then both shadows slipped off the bright space, and in my anger and surprise, I dropped to the ground.

I thought of the murdered father and the defenseless girl, and then I counted the windows; the lighted one was the third from the main building, and on the second floor. How could I reach it? Not by climbing; then I bethought myself of the postern in that very wing, and went feeling my way along in search of it, my naked sword in my hand. There were strange thoughts in my heart just then, and it would have cost the boyar dear to meet me in that gloomy court. I found the postern and tried it; to my joy, it yielded to my hand, and I found myself in a dark, narrow hall. For a moment I stood nonplussed, not knowing which way to turn; but as luck would have it, a noise to the left sent me to the right, and finding a door, I opened it and stumbled upon a staircase. A light in the hall above served to make the darkness visible, and I crept cautiously up the stairs, a step at a time. Before I gained the top, the closing of a door sounded somewhat sharply, and with it all

gleam of light went out, so I knew that it had proceeded from a room. Reaching the head of the stairs, I paused to take my bearings. Coming in at the door, I had turned to the right, so the stairs had led me toward the main building, and the window was the third away from it; I must turn now to the left. With this small clue, I felt my way along the corridor, passing two doors, and pausing at the third. There was a light within, for it shone through the chink at the bottom, and I heard a woman's voice. Remembering only the shadow-drama on the wall, and the orphan's helplessness, I opened the door, without a thought of the strangeness of my presence and my errand.

The light within fell full upon me on the threshold, and on my drawn sword. There was confusion and a startled cry, one woman rushing away to the farther door; but the other remained where she was, — a slender young girl, standing in the center of the room, her pose one of dignity, her fair hair falling in heavy braids on either shoulder, and a red mark showing angrily on her white cheek. It was Zénaïde Feodorovna.

CHAPTER V.

ZÉNAÏDE.

UNDER Zénaïde's startled and half-frightened gaze, I felt myself a fool. My ardent knight-errantry dwindled, and I stood revealed, a rash intruder on the privacy of a Russian household.

Zénaïde was the first to recover her self-possession; she had divined my nationality, for she addressed me in French.

"Monsieur has made some strange error," she said in a dignified way, "and stumbled upon the private quarter of the house. His errand is with my uncle, no doubt."

I was at loss to explain my blundering ardor.

"Mademoiselle," I stammered, feeling my face burn, "I had cause to think you were in need of assistance — I — pardon me, I do but increase my awkwardness."

She looked at me strangely, a new emotion dyeing her cheek with scarlet.

"Monsieur is kind," she said a little haughtily; "I am indebted to my uncle's friend, I presume, monsieur — "

She paused, and her eyes sought mine with a keen interrogation. I stood erect; something in her tone stung me.

"I am not your uncle's friend, Mademoiselle Ramodanofsky," I said a little defiantly; "I am a stranger to him, a French gentleman, Philippe de Brousson."

There was a startled cry from the farther side of the room, where the other woman had remained; she came across now, staring at me strangely.

"Philippe de Brousson!" she cried in a high French voice. "It is Philippe, little Philippe!"

It was my turn to stare in blank astonishment. She was a tall angular woman, with near-sighted eyes, and gray curls dancing on her temples. I did not know her, but it was evident that she recognized me with ecstasy. Zénaïde was looking at her with a reflection of my amazement.

"Mademoiselle Eudoxie," she said warningly, "you are very short-sighted; you may have made another mistake."

The name struck me at once as familiar, and

I looked at the woman with a sudden vague recollection.

"You know me, Monsieur Philippe?" she said, regarding me with a smile on her quaint thin face; "you remember old Eudoxie Varien, who taught you and little Marie, the saints rest her soul!"

It was the governess who had watched over my little sister and me in the old château, the Tour de Brousson. I remembered her very well now, and grasped her hand warmly, a thousand memories of childhood and my dead sister thronging into my mind.

"If we had met at any other moment, Mademoiselle Eudoxie," I said, "I should have known you at once."

The tears were shining in the good woman's eyes, and with a sudden impulse, she stood on tip-toe and kissed my cheek.

"Oh, little Philippe!" she exclaimed tremulously. "Forgive an old woman, M. de Brousson; you bring back the happiest hours of my life. Do you remember the rose-garden behind the château, and the day the hawk was killed?"

I remembered it well, and in that far country, in the upper room of a Russian boyar's house, the perfume of the roses of Provence

seemed to float upon my senses; and I saw again the gray château with its graceful turrets and neat, beautiful garden, with its hedges and its terraces. Childhood passes so swiftly, and never again returns the light heart, the innocent mind! Mademoiselle Eudoxie and I looked long at each other, and my childish affection for the kindly governess awoke in a genuine regard for this faded woman.

Recollecting myself, I turned to apologize to Mademoiselle Ramodanofsky, but she was regarding me with quite a different expression; my strange entrance was evidently forgotten, and she was smiling as she looked at Mademoiselle Eudoxie's flushed and tearful face.

"Pardon me, mademoiselle," I said; "I trespass upon your courtesy, but this meeting was as unexpected as my entrance here."

"I rejoice to see Mademoiselle Eudoxie so happy," Zénaïde replied graciously; and then, after a moment's hesitation, "Will M. de Brousson be seated?"

Mademoiselle Eudoxie looked at her in a kind of panic.

"Your uncle, Zénaïde!" she said hastily.

The young girl's eyes flashed with sudden fire.

"These are my own apartments," she replied,

* with a touch of hauteur, “and my uncle will scarcely intrude here again to-night.”

I knew, however, that they were in a dilemma, and that my presence there was contrary to usage and propriety. I was the more willing to depart, since I felt that Mademoiselle Eudoxie was not only a protection to Zénaïde, but a medium of communication. I had not found courage to explain my errand.

“I will not intrude longer upon your hospitality, mademoiselle,” I said to Zénaïde; “but perhaps another time I may speak with Mademoiselle Eudoxie and with — you.”

A mischievous smile gleamed suddenly in Zénaïde’s blue eyes.

“Mademoiselle Varien, light this gentleman down the stairs,” she said quietly. “And you, M. de Brousson, have my thanks for — for your kind solicitude,” she added, blushing deeply and holding out her hand.

I bowed low over it, and in some blundering way bade her adieu, and went with Mademoiselle Eudoxie along the corridor, bearing the light for her, and feeling both exultant and foolish at the termination of my enterprise. At the end of the passage we stumbled upon a servant, who stared not a little at the sight of a stranger lighting the governess down the stairs. When

we reached the lower floor, and were alone, mademoiselle plucked at my cloak.

"Monsieur Philippe," she said, her short-sighted eyes trying to search my face, "how did you happen to come here to-night?"

It was a relief that I could at least explain matters fully to her, and she would probably repeat it to Zénaïde. I told her of my adventure in the courtyard, and of the shadows on the wall. She was still a little puzzled, for of course I did not speak of Von Gaden's confidence.

"Did the boyar really strike Zénaïde?" I asked.

"I fear so," mademoiselle replied, a troubled expression on her face; "they had a stormy interview, at which I was not present, and I saw the red mark on dear Zénaïde's cheek."

"He is cruel to her, then?" I said sternly.

Mademoiselle stammered a little. "I cannot say cruel," she said. "I have been here ten years with Zénaïde, and he has always allowed her to have everything she wished, but without seeming fond of her. He is a strange man. I can almost say that he avoided the sight of the child; but now all these things are changed. He is anxious for her to marry, and of course has his own ends to serve, and cares not at all

for Zénaïde's happiness. I tried to mold her mind to gentle submission, foreseeing this end; but Zénaïde has, they tell me, her father's will, and she will not be guided; and now the house is in a constant tumult because of this match that she will not hear of."

"I honor her the more," I said at once; "no woman should wed Viatscheslav."

Mademoiselle Eudoxie stared at me in mild surprise, but shrank back in horror when I told her briefly a little of the character of the profligate suitor. She wrung her thin hands.

"Alas!" she exclaimed, "what will she do? There is no escape; the authority of the guardian is even more absolute here than in France, and she has no one to fight for her, poor girl!"

"Except you and me, mademoiselle," I added softly.

The old woman looked at me with a sudden suspicion in her glance, followed by an expression of yet deeper anxiety.

"You were ever too hot-blooded and hasty, Philippe," she said, but I detected a note of tender sympathy in her voice. "You and I would but make an evil case worse. I see no help for Zénaïde. Peter was elected to-day, and the Naryshkins are in power."

I drew closer to her. "Is there any one about?" I said.

She started as if she had been shot, and looked nervously behind her. I smiled, knowing what a coward mademoiselle always was. She assured me now that we were out of earshot.

"Then I may speak of forbidden subjects," I said. "Take heart, mademoiselle; the struggle may not be over. No one believes that the Streltsi will support Peter Alexeivitch, and if the Miloslavskys rise, who knows what may not happen? Certainly the Naryshkins will be thrust aside, and this old boyar will never barter his niece to an exile or a fugitive!"

"Now the saints grant that it may be so!" exclaimed mademoiselle, piously. "But I have little hope that Zénaïde can escape; he is urging on a hasty marriage."

I was not so despondent; I thought of Von Gaden, and a plan was already forming in my mind. I told her where my quarters were.

"If there is any trouble here," I said earnestly, "find some means of sending me a message."

Then, seeing the doubt and perplexity in her face, I went on impressively: "It is your duty, dear mademoiselle," I said; "you must not con-

nive at this sacrifice. You must save Zénaïde if you can, and do not despise my help; I may find more means of assistance than you dream of. Where there is a will, there is a way! Therefore, be sure to inform me if any danger threatens Mademoiselle Ramodanofsky."

I saw at once that I had impressed her; Mademoiselle Eudoxie was naturally one of those women who cling to any man as a better protector than their own wits, and she evidently had an exaggerated conception of my importance. At least, she promised readily enough to keep me informed if she could find a trusty messenger, but told me of a surer means of communication by observing her window, which overlooked the lane on the other side of the wing. There was a romance about it all, which I saw was delightful to the gentle old maid, who had lived only in the reflection of the romances of others. She went with me to the postern, and bade me a tender and half tearful adieu. She closed the door behind me, and I had advanced a few steps, when I heard her open it again hastily, and come running after me. I turned, expecting some important information which she had forgotten. She laid a trembling hand on my arm, and approached her lips close to my ear.

"Monsieur Philippe," she whispered, "forgive me for speaking out, but I have lived ten years in Russia, and I know their ways. Do not fall in love with her!"

I drew myself up haughtily; I was angry.

"If you intend any inference derogatory to Mademoiselle Zénaïde—" I began.

"No—no!" she cried hastily, almost tearfully. "What a traitor you must think me! Zénaïde is the dearest girl in the world; the sweetest I ever knew, save one, and that was your own dead sister, Philippe. But these Russians!" she looked over her shoulder as if she saw a ghost, "they would kill you, dear boy!"

I laughed under my breath; but still I remembered where I stood, and the murdered Feodor.

"I will risk it, Mademoiselle Eudoxie," I said lightly. "I would risk it gladly to win Zénaïde Feodorovna!"

"Alas!" exclaimed the old maid, tearfully. "I feared it—I feared it! You were ever so, Monsieur Philippe: quick as a flash, and hot-headed. No good can come of it!"

"Nonsense, mademoiselle!" I cried almost gayly; "I have not touched her heart yet. Go back, or some one will find us here whispering,

and then, indeed, there will be a bloody catastrophe."

Remembering that prudence is the better part of valor, she retreated, but shaking her head in melancholy foreboding, the last words that I heard being—

"Poor Zénarde! — poor Philippe!"

And the conjunction of names, instead of pointing mademoiselle's warning, thrilled me with an absurd happiness.

CHAPTER VI.

A KITCHEN FEUD.

WHEN the postern had finally closed upon mademoiselle, I advanced cautiously through the darkness. It had occurred to me that the outer gate might be closed for the night, in which case I should find myself caught in a trap. The house was dark and quiet now, the boyar's guest having evidently departed.

To my consternation, the front gate was indeed locked, and I stood perplexed. A noise from the other side of the house suggested a possible exit by the kitchen way, and I crept cautiously along close to the wall, looking for it. The door at the back of the house stood wide open, and the stream of light from it, while it increased my risk, served also to show me the side gate, standing ajar. I had not a moment to lose; to be caught here and compelled to explain my presence to the boyar would be a sorry fate. I heard loud talking

and laughing in the kitchen, which a little reassured me, as the servants were evidently enjoying a merry evening, and therefore less likely to be watchful. A little natural curiosity, and also a desire to learn as much of Zénaïde's surroundings as I could, impelled me to approach near enough to peep into the interior: a low-ceiled room, stained with smoke from the huge fireplace, and gloomy as such a place could be, when lighted and filled with people. The cook, with naked, brawny arms akimbo, stood before the fire turning some meat upon the spit; and a dozen other serfs were gathered about a table playing at dice, or watching it, and drinking *kvas*. It was not an attractive picture, not even homely; but there was a surprise there for me: I saw in the group the cowardly fellow who had been whipped in the contest in the Red Place. I remembered his face well; it had still something of the evil and mean expression that had marked it when Peter Lykof dragged his servant off his fallen adversary. The place he occupied now at the table, and his dress, declared him to be no less a person than the boyar's major-domo. The fellow had an evil face and a hang-dog look about the eyes, and I was not pleased to find him occupying a post of trust in the house. One could easily buy his soul

for a couple of francs, being sure that he would sell again to the next highest bidder, and so cancel the previous bad bargain. I was amused to see that the miserable coward of a few hours ago was now a considerable braggart, assuming an air of authority among his fellow-servants.

There was little danger that my presence would be observed, and I walked slowly across the courtyard, and slipping through the half open gate, stood in the street. It was dark, but yet it seemed to me that as I appeared a figure dashed away from the postern and crept along by the wall. Remembering that I had noticed a similar appearance at the front of the house, I half unsheathed my sword and advanced in the direction in which the figure had gone, my taste for adventure still keen, and moreover determined to know if any spy lurked about the Ramodanofsky house. The darkness and the shadow of the wall were both unfavorable to my purpose; but nothing daunted, I proceeded, my eyes fixed keenly on the darkest portion under the overhanging cornice. Seeing nothing, I was not a little startled by a sudden blow which, just missing my temple, fell roundly on my shoulder. I sprang aside, and drawing my sword, was on the defensive; but my unknown

adversary leaped upon me with the agility and ferocity of a wild animal, and I found my sword arm pinioned as we closed in a fierce grapple. I had no desire to rouse the house by any outcry, and, for some reason, my assailant was equally silent. I had as much as I could do to keep his hands from my throat.

"*Ma foi!*!" I exclaimed bitterly, "this is Russian fighting!"

My words had a magical effect; my strange adversary released me and stumbled back. But my blood was up, and it was my turn to attack him; however, he dodged me with wonderful dexterity.

"Leave me alone, your excellency," he said in poor French; "I struck by mistake. I beg your pardon."

His voice was familiar, and putting two and two together, in a flash of intuition, I hit upon the truth.

"You are Michael Gregorievitch!" I exclaimed, "Peter Lykof's attendant; and you took me for your friend the steward."

"Even so, my lord," he admitted with evident reluctance in his tone. "My master would be very angry if he knew of my mistake."

"Unless my memory plays me false, your master forbade you to meddle with this same

steward," I remarked dryly. "His displeasure does not seem to affect you deeply."

"He would not submit as tamely as I do in a like case," returned Michael, sullenly.

"I must admit," I said lightly, "that I can understand your repugnance to the sleek steward; his countenance is sufficiently unlovely to tempt an honest man to beat him; but the ardor of your resentment seems a little ill-timed and treacherous."

"Treacherous!" The man was choking with his intense anger. "No treachery could be great enough for Boris Polotsky!"

My interest was roused, and moreover I saw the possibility of obtaining a warm adherent in this fellow.

"You have a grievance, Michael," I said pleasantly, "and I sympathize warmly with your detestation of this man; what is your especial wrong?"

The fellow hesitated for a moment, and I seemed to feel his keen eyes trying to see my face in the darkness.

"I have suffered many wrongs from him," he said bitterly, falling into the Russian tongue, and therefore speaking more volubly; "he is a very devil, and the devil's emissary. In every way in which one man can hurt another, he has injured me."

"For instance, wedding your sweetheart?" I suggested lightly.

The man swore under his breath.

"He stole my wife away from me, for one thing, and afterwards beat her to death!" he exclaimed passionately.

I started; what a fit servant for Vladimir Sergheievitch!

"At least, she was punished for her infidelity," I remarked dryly.

"She was more foolish than wicked at the first," the fellow protested with a break in his harsh voice; "but that smooth-tongued fellow made her his tool and dupe. He is well placed," he added vindictively, "a fiend, and the servant of one!" and he shook his fist vehemently at the dark house.

My mind was full of speculations; it was evident that there was something here that did not appear upon the surface.

"You have a cause of complaint, then, against the Boyar Ramodanofsky also?" I asked with an assumption of carelessness.

I could feel rather than see that the man received a shock at my words, suddenly awakening to the fact that he was making admissions that might be dangerous.

"I have said too much," he stammered.

"There is too great a gulf between the boyar and a humble man like me for any quarrel."

"Ay," I said, with a purpose, "unless you take to heart your master's grievances."

There was a pause. I knew that I had startled the fellow, and he was not sufficiently adroit to escape from the trap into which he had fallen; I could hear his labored breath, and divined that he was in a cold sweat of anxiety and alarm.

"My master has no grievances," he blurted out, evidently sore pressed for an evasion. "I am but a fool to speak of my own."

"Your master strikes me as one who might have many," I replied coolly; then, taking pity on a confusion that I understood without seeing it: "You have nothing to fear," I said reassuringly; "I am not a friend of the boyar's, though I did come out of his gate," and I laughed a little, silently, at the thought of my strange exit.

"Your excellency is wise," the fellow exclaimed earnestly; "no man is safe in such friendship."

"Like master like man, you think, then, my good Michael," I said lightly. "It is certain that I shall remember your fists for a while, and I venture to predict that Polotsky will presently have enough of them."

"I beg your pardon a thousand times, my lord," stammered the man, evidently divided between a desire to establish himself in my good graces, and to escape my inquiries.

"You have it freely," I said laughing, "since I escaped with a whole crown; next time be sure of your adversary, and then be thorough in your castigation; but take my advice and fight by day, in the open, like a man."

"It is rare for me to get the chance," Michael protested; "he is a sneak, and hides himself away in secure places."

"Such vermin usually do," I replied calmly; "however, I wish you good-night and good luck, only be sure and be thorough next time."

As I walked away down the street I laughed a little to myself at the absurdity of my adventure, ending, as it had, in a narrow escape from a thrashing at the hands of a lackey. I felt confident that Zénaïde would soon be rid of one of her uncle's vilest tools, for Michael would probably murder Polotsky before many days; and I reflected that a kitchen feud was not without its advantages.

It was now late, and I proceeded directly to my own quarters, and found that my man had my supper waiting for me. Pierrot was an

invaluable servant: devoted, accomplished, and discreet. I had obtained much useful information from this quarter, and I could always depend upon his fidelity; in fact, it was only that which kept him in Russia, for he hated it with a cordiality only equalled by his smooth appearance of complacence. It had cost me not a little trouble to have him instructed in the Russian tongue; but he amply repaid me by the usefulness that resulted from his acquirement: without it he could have been of little service, for it was almost impossible to find a humble Russian who understood French, or any language but his own. In that day accomplishments were not frequent, and few Russians spoke French: Prince Basil Galitsyn, who was in advance of his class, resorting to Latin in his intercourse with foreigners.

I was tired, and my appetite had been sharpened by a continued fast, so I sat down to my supper in a very good humor. Pierrot waited upon me with silent dexterity, and then, retiring to a little distance, stood watching me with folded arms, and an air which I was not slow to interpret: he had news, and longed to impart it.

“Well, Pierrot,” I said at last, “were you in the Grand Square to-day?”

"Yes, M. le Vicomte," he replied eagerly; "and was it not a stirring sight?"

"Very," I answered dryly; "and what is the feeling among the people, Pierrot? Are they pleased with the election?"

Pierrot shook his head with the air of a sage.

"The people have not much to do with it after all," he said gravely. "The rabble have not the intelligence of our peasantry."

This was a heavy judgment, for Pierrot, as an old retainer, looked down upon the peasantry as the scum of the earth.

"It is the soldiers here," he went on, evidently glad to speak his mind; "they have the upper hand. I can't understand this Streltsi."

I laughed. "Few of us can, I suspect, Pierrot," I said; "the Streltsi, or archers, were established by Ivan the Terrible, as a kind of national guard. Their duties descend from father to son, and they have ever been a privileged class."

"They are ill to guide, monsieur," Pierrot remarked sagely, as he handed me the wine.

"And what do they think?" I inquired, not a little amused but also curious.

"They are angry," Pierrot replied, lowering his voice as if he fancied that one of them was under the table; "they do not love the Czarina

Natalia's relations and — ” Pierrot glanced cautiously over his shoulder; “the Czarevna Sophia has been trying to influence them for the Czarevitch Ivan. There are twenty-two regiments, and only one of them is favorable to the young czar.”

“All that seems to be apparent enough, Pierrot,” I remarked quietly.

“That is not all, M. le Vicomte,” he said eagerly; “they are plotting against the Department of the Streltsi; they hate both the Princes Dolgoruky and their own officers. It is rumored to-day that there will be a riot if something is not done, and if there is!” Pierrot lifted his eyes and hands, a picture of horror.

“What will be the consequence?” I asked, though I knew well enough, and it took the relish away from my supper.

“If the officers are not sacrificed,” Pierrot said in a dreadful undertone, “they will have blood, and it will be the boyars, perhaps the Czarevitch Peter.”

“The czar, you mean,” I corrected testily, for I knew that he was touching the truth very nearly. “They will not dare to harm him.”

Pierrot shook his head gloomily.

“You have not heard them, M. le Vicomte,” he said in a tone of melancholy pity for my

credulity; “they are after blood, like wolves; and if it comes to that, there will not be a house safe for a boyar to hide in in Moscow!”

I pushed back my chair and rose from the table with an angry gesture.

“You forget, Pierrot,” I said tartly, “that these men were born to obey; they cannot resist the imperial authority.”

I said it more for my own comfort than for his conviction, for I was sick at heart, and could think of nothing but the young girl in the house of a boyar who was both feared and despised. Meanwhile, Pierrot had the air of not desiring to contradict his superior, even in his folly, — an air peculiar to Pierrot, and especially irritating.

“The Russians are very bloodthirsty, M. le Vicomte,” he said, by way of a mild remonstrance, “and there is no one now at the head of the government but a boy and a woman.”

“There is a great deal of awe felt of a czar, my good Pierrot,” I replied lightly, “and presently they will have the chancellor back again; and you know the Streltsi once took stones from the graves of their fathers to build him a house.”

But Pierrot still continued to shake his head with aggravating solemnity.

CHAPTER VII.

A CZAR'S FUNERAL.

My original errand in Moscow was a diplomatic one; it had been my good fortune to be selected as the confidential agent of the French government, empowered to look into and secure certain conditions of the treaty with Russia made by Richelieu many years before. My father, who was a cousin of the Duc de Bouillon and of the Vicomte de Turenne, had been a trusted friend of Cardinal Mazarin, and was commended to King Louis XIV. by the dying cardinal. The king had held my father in high esteem, and at his death received me into his favor. I was a soldier by instinct and profession, and had served with both Turenne and the Prince de Condé, being with the latter at the bloody battle of Seneffe, where the four squadrons of the king's household stood under fire for eight hours without a movement, save

to close our ranks as men fell. I followed Turenne in his campaign in the Palatinate, and was with him at the time of his death before the village of Salzbach. The year before I was sent to Moscow, I rendered a service at the surrender of Strasburg which won the good opinion of Louvois, who was then towering above the king's other ministers. I was in command of one of the squadrons posted to guard the passage over the Rhine, and it was through my vigilance that the messengers from the burgesses were captured on their way to ask aid from the emperor. Both Louis and Louvois believed that their success was, in a measure, due to my zeal and activity; and from that hour my fortune was assured, and I was promoted from one post of confidence to another. Although diplomacy was not my natural vocation, I was pleased at the novelty of a mission to Moscow; and becoming well acquainted at court, I lingered on, after the successful accomplishment of my mission. I saw the intrigues preceding the late czar's death, and learned a great deal about the undercurrent at the palace. I was regarded as a disinterested spectator, having friends on both sides. My rank as an agent of the French government gave me many privileges

from which others were excluded. It was on my intimacy with court intrigue that I based my hope of rescuing Zénaïde from her murderous uncle; and it was probably my unique position that won for me Von Gaden's confidence.

On the day of the Czar Feodor's funeral, I was early at the palace, and found it the scene of great confusion. The anterooms were crowded with the dignitaries of the imperial household and with the boyars. The funeral *cortége* was to proceed to the Cathedral of the Ascension for the obsequies; and I saw, at once, that there was some unusual excitement, especially among the Miloslavskys and their faction. As I crossed the anterooms beyond the banqueting hall, I passed Ramodanofsky, who was in a window recess in deep converse with Viatscheslav Naryshkin and the Streltsi colonel whom I had seen at his house. For the first time, I encountered a keen glance from the old boyar; it was evident to me that I had suddenly become an object of interest to him, and yet I was at loss to explain the reason, being confident that my visit to his house was unknown to him. I passed on, and at the opposite door, I came upon Ivan Miloslavsky, a cousin of the Czarevitch Ivan's mother, the Princess Marie Illi-

nitchna Miloslavsky, the first wife of Alexis the Debonair.

Ivan Michaelovitch Miloslavsky was the most able of that family, except his second cousin, the Czarevna Sophia Alexeievna. I had now a desire to cultivate the good graces of this faction, for I felt that the tide might turn at any hour in favor of the elder branch of the imperial family. So it was that my salutation was cordial, and I was well pleased at Miloslavsky's ready response; he turned and walked with me, and it was thus that I passed again before Ramodanofsky and his friends, and observed that the three worthies ceased talking, to watch us as we walked the length of the room, Miloslavsky leaning on my arm, and talking confidentially. After we were out of earshot, I ventured to make an inquiry.

"Can your excellency tell me anything of the boyar in the window yonder?" I asked.

"It is Vladimir Sergheievitch Ramodanofsky," replied Miloslavsky, with a note of scorn in his voice; "an old villain, and an adherent of the Naryshkins."

"I have heard unfavorable reports of him," I said, feeling my way with caution.

"Nothing you have heard could be worse

than the truth, I fancy," replied Ivan, indifferently. "Some day he will be called to his account; meanwhile, he is enjoying his little hour of prosperity."

"And who is the officer with him?" I inquired, pushing my advantage.

Miloslavsky glanced back and shrugged his shoulders.

"Another rascal, Colonel Pzykof, and he is likely to be called to an early reckoning," he added, a peculiar smile curving his full lips,—a smile which suggested to me at once the triumph of some secret scheme.

"The funeral procession is forming now," he continued, quickening his step, "and they will be disturbed by an unusual occurrence."

"I saw that there was some interest awake," I said. "What is the new development?"

Miloslavsky smiled again.

"The Czarevna Sophia goes in the procession," he said quietly.

I started, knowing that this was contrary to every usage of the Russian court, and that the Byzantine custom compelled the imperial princesses to remain behind a canopy. Miloslavsky saw my surprise.

"It is an innovation," he said; "but Sophia Alexeievna is overcome with grief for her

brother; and, after all, why should not a sister stand beside her brother's corpse?"

He seemed to challenge me to express an opinion.

"I am surprised only because I know that your customs are so arbitrary," I replied, smoothly. "In France, it would seem most natural for the czarevna to follow her brother's body to the grave."

"Yet it has been the cause of much dispute," said Miloslavsky, bitterly, "and the Czarina Natalia is opposed to it. Naturally enough she does not grieve much that the elder brother has passed away from her son's path to the throne," he added in an undertone.

I was discreetly silent. We had passed through the anterooms out on to the Red Staircase, and stood looking down upon the crowd. It reminded me of the election of Peter, only that this was a silent throng, impressed, no doubt, by the presence of death. The procession was forming, and everywhere the black garb of mourning seemed to swallow up the light. The Russian dress of that day was a strange contrast to the French. The men wore robes and sleeves as long as those of the women, and a man's high cap was not unlike a woman's head-gear. It was seventeen years afterwards

that Peter the Great inaugurated a change of fashion by cutting off the sleeves of the boyars, with his own hands, at a supper given by the Boyar Sheremétief. Verily, I have lived to see great changes in Russia since that day, when I stood looking down upon the Red Place, thronged with black-robed figures, and upon the bier of the Czar Feodor. It was the darkest hour in that period of history, and just before the dawn of a new reign; the star of the house of Romanof was in the ascendant, but its light was not yet diffused.

It was a dull day; the sky was heavy, and the Kremlin wore its most gloomy aspect; even the red pavement of the square was almost obscured by the mass of people, and the voices of the multitude were hushed as the deep notes of the great cathedral bells tolled solemnly, on every hand, the mournful dirge of Russia's mightiest, laid in the dust to share at last the common fate of his humblest subject,—for how great a leveller is Death!

Miloslavsky and I were parted when we took our places in the dreary procession, and the slow march to the cathedral was begun. Every eye was turned on the Czarevna Sophia Alexeievna, who walked beside the bier of the late czar. I saw that the Miloslavskys were play-

ing for high stakes, for the unusual presence of one of the princesses and her manifest grief were producing a strange effect upon the vast crowd surging about the *cortége*. It seemed a long time before we stood at last within the great cathedral, which was draped in black until it looked like a huge sarcophagus, and the multitude, swayed by a new and deep emotion, packed the immense edifice and filled the square without. It was a scene of strange solemnity. Before the altar stood the bier, covered with the imperial pall, and the tall tapers around it made a blaze of light almost dazzling in its contrast to the gloom of the rest of the great interior, except here and there, where a ray of light was caught and reflected from the gold upon the pillars. By the dead czar stood the patriarch and the archbishops in their rich robes, chanting the service, while the multitude knelt in the silence beyond. Every word that the priests chanted sounded clearly in that intense quiet, and the awful solemnity of death brooded over us. A dead man, but for that hour, czar of all the Russias still! It seemed to my imagination that some secret emotion possessed the kneeling crowd, that every breath was drawn with some new resolution, that even the atmosphere was surcharged

with foreboding. The blaze of gold and silver upon the high altar flashed in the light of a hundred tapers, and every line in the patriarch's face was magnified in that clear blaze; but beyond the circle of the tapers, not even the daylight seemed to penetrate to where we knelt in the shadow, and the low chant of the clergy rose and fell and sobbed in its monotonous refrain.

Suddenly, in the midst of that solemn ceremony, we heard a woman's voice raised in lamentation. I think that every man in that great multitude caught his breath to listen, and every eye was fixed on that circle of flame about the pall, as the Czarevna Sophia rose and stretched out her hands in passionate supplication to Heaven. Her words were incoherent, but we heard her voice, and we saw her as she flung herself down beside the bier, clutching it in an agony of grief.

Was she acting? I asked myself the question even while I felt a scorn of myself for being contemptuous in my judgment of a stricken woman; for truly, in losing her elder brother, she had lost her chief stay and hope. Yet I knew the great Sophia too well to be wholly sure that her emotion was entirely without thought of its effect upon the people; I knew

her to be an astute politician and an adroit manager. Yet it was a pathetic scene,—the strong woman's abandon in her grief and despair. The effect upon the multitude was at once apparent; there was a murmur through the crowd, low but deep. And it was then that the Czarina Natalia took that step which caused so much unfavorable comment. Taking the little Czar Peter by the hand, she left the cathedral, and in a few moments, by some mysterious agency, the news spread through the crowd; and in that hour the czarina lost more prestige than she was likely to regain for many a long day. The sharp contrast between the agony of Sophia's grief, and the absence of reverence for the dead in the czarina's conduct was too strikingly presented to the people. The excuse that Natalia pleaded, that the child Peter was weary with the long service, was insufficient, for the Miloslavskys were only too eager to fan the flame of popular resentment against the young czar's mother.

It was when we were at last leaving the cathedral, pressed and hemmed in by the crowd, that I was pushed almost against the Boyar Ramodanofsky. As I glanced at him, I saw a curious look come over his face; his features seemed to freeze with sudden horror, and his

eyes fixed themselves in a stare. Following the direction of his glance, I saw in the crowd the tall figure of my acquaintance of election day, Peter Lykof. He was apparently looking at the boyar, and there was a smile on his lips; and was it the scar that so distorted it, and made it horrible, mocking, revengeful? I watched them in keen surprise, until the people surged between, and I saw Lykof no more. Ramodanofsky walked before me like a man in a dream, and I kept him in sight as long as it was possible; but presently, in the press and confusion, I lost him also. Later, I heard that he had been taken suddenly ill, and leaving the procession, had been driven home. All the way along I looked eagerly for another sign of Lykof, but my vigilance was not rewarded with success.

Meanwhile, the funeral *cortége* took its slow course, returning across the Grand Square of the Kremlin, and once more the figure of the bereaved czarevna absorbed all attention, and she continued to give way to her grief. We had almost reached the centre of the Red Place when she made her appeal to the people. It was the climax of the scene, and took the opposing faction completely by surprise. Pausing, and facing the vast multitude, she stretched

out her hands to them with an eloquent gesture; in a moment there was a profound silence, and her voice was distinctly heard at a long distance:—

“Our brother, the Czar Feodor, has departed from this life,” she said. “His enemies have poisoned him. Be merciful unto us orphans, for we are desolate. Our brother Ivan has not been elected czar, and we have no one to protect us. We are innocent; but if you and the boyars wish to be rid of us, let us go to other lands, where we can have the protection of Christian kings.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ASSASSIN.

WHEN it was too late to prevent the consequences, the Naryshkins realized the effect of the Czarevna Sophia's presence at the funeral of Feodor. Her passionate appeal to the people was in the nature of a *coup d'état*, and who could measure the results? For days, rumors had been afloat that the late czar had been poisoned, and the ignorant populace, always only too ready to credit such accusations, accepted Sophia's bold declaration as a confirmation of every story, and the ugly skeleton of murder stalked out of the imperial closet. The crowd had surged about the czarevna in a violent manifestation of loyalty, and the unfortunate exit of the Czarina Natalia served to increase the victory. Peter was then only ten years old, and the czarina was probably justified in taking the child away from that long and weary service; but no excuse would be accepted for her in the heat of the popular displeasure.

When I left the Kremlin that evening, I encountered Dr. von Gaden, and he walked with me a little way towards my quarters. The doctor was anxious and disturbed, and we discussed the conduct of the czarevna.

"The Miloslavskys are desperate," Von Gaden remarked, "and Sophia is able enough and clever enough to wring success out of their defeat; they are playing on the disloyalty of the Streltsi."

"A dangerous move," I replied. "I heard to-day that the Streltsi had presented a formal petition for redress and the punishment of their own officers."

"Yes," Von Gaden said, shaking his head thoughtfully, "only one regiment remains faithful to the young czar."

"You mean the Sukharef, and I suppose they will tamper even with that."

"Ay, no doubt," the physician said; "and yet, when this trouble is let loose, who can stem the current? It may be more mighty than they suppose. He who sows the wind must reap the whirlwind!"

"It is a desperate game, and both parties are playing desperately. I hear that the Chancellor Matveief is coming home."

"That we have all expected," replied Von

Gaden. "Your friend Ivan Michaelovitch Miloslavsky is reported ill to-night."

"Strange," I remarked; "he seemed in good health to-day."

"It is but acting," said the physician, bitterly; "they are all acting now. Miloslavsky has some end in view which can be best served by isolation, therefore he is ill."

"A few days ago the cause of the Czarevitch Ivan was desperate," I remarked musingly, "but now the Czar Peter's hold on the imperial sceptre seems precarious. There has been shrewd work done in the interval."

"And the czarevna's charge that the Czar Feodor was poisoned will rouse the very devil among this ignorant rabble, and I was the late czar's physician!" Von Gaden shrugged his shoulders. "I must even throw myself on the mercy of the Czarina Natalia, since the Miloslavskys would sacrifice my head right cheerfully, if it would promote their cause."

"I have imagined that Matveief could control these warring factions," I said; "it needs a master's hand and a cool head. Why does he not hasten to the scene of action?"

Von Gaden smiled. "The ex-chancellor has an affection for his head, and likes to feel it on his shoulders," he replied dryly. "His

son sends him information, and I believe he is waiting for this storm to blow over before he launches his bark upon the sea of popular favor."

"This tempest will never blow over until it has spent its fury," I rejoined.

As I spoke, the doctor touched my arm, and signed to me to look in front of us. The moon was partially obscured by thin clouds, but there was light enough for me to see two figures ahead, one skulking in the rear of the other, and keeping in the shelter of the houses. The first one walked boldly along in the middle of the road, a large figure wrapped in a long cloak; the stealthy form was not quite so tall or broad, but more agile and fleet of foot. It was the peculiar movements of the latter that had attracted the physician's notice.

"Watch them," he said in a low voice; "that fellow behind gains slowly but surely on the other, who is apparently unconscious of his pursuit."

"If I ever saw a murderer and his victim, I see them now," I replied in as low a tone; "let us give the alarm."

The doctor shook his head. "Not yet," he said; "rather follow and see the upshot of it. There is something familiar to me in the bearing of the taller man."

I was conscious, too, of recognizing a certain familiarity of outline. Slipping into the shadow, we followed in the wake of the pursuer and pursued. We kept at some distance in the rear, that our footsteps might not be noticed; and the strange procession continued for some distance without the stealthy spy showing any signs of a malicious purpose. Our road lay through a lonely quarter of the town, and we had encountered no one as yet, so that our interest was centered on the two before us. The tall man in front was going straight towards the section of the city occupied by the Streltsi. In a quarter of an hour, we turned into a deserted lane, narrow and so shadowed by the high walls on either side, that not even the struggling light of the moon could penetrate it. It was here that we heard the sudden sound of a struggle in front of us, and dashed forward to the rescue. I almost stumbled over the two rolling on the ground, for I could barely discern them in the darkness; the larger man had evidently been tripped up by a sudden assault from the rear, and was beneath. I seized the other by the collar, dragging him off with difficulty, for he seemed determined to finish his fiendish work. His victim lay for a moment motionless.

"Is he injured?" I asked in French, of Von Gaden, as he knelt beside him. But as I spoke, the stranger recovered sufficiently to raise himself.

"I thank you for your promptness, M. de Brousson," he said. "You were in the nick of time; the villain's knife was at my throat."

It was Peter Lykof. Recovering from my surprise, I asked him if he was free from injury.

"A trifle scratched and a little shaken," he said calmly, rising with the doctor's help. "It is a shock to a man's nerves to be suddenly choked and thrown down. Who is the rascal?"

"We shall need more light to see," I remarked carelessly, meanwhile keeping my knee on the fellow's chest and my pistol at his head. "Have you a bit of cord there, Dr. von Gaden?" I added. "If we can tie his hands and disarm him, it will be easy to take him home for safe keeping."

In a few moments we had bound his hands with the doctor's scarf, and having disarmed him, allowed him to rise. Von Gaden invited Lykof to come with us, that he might dress his slight wound, and after a little hesitation, the invitation was accepted, and we returned towards the doctor's house, the prisoner walk-

ing in advance and covered by my pistol, which I kept ready cocked.

"Go a step faster than we do," I said sharply, "and I will shoot you."

Thus we moved along in a solemn manner towards Von Gaden's quarters. Even in the darkness I was sure that I recognized my prisoner's figure, and was not surprised to have my supposition verified on entering the house. It was the Boyar Ramodanofsky's steward, Polotsky. Von Gaden looked at him with a grunt of disgust.

"What will you do with him?" I asked.

The physician stood a moment absorbed in thought.

Meanwhile, Lykof remained in the shadow by the door, taking no part in the discussion, although he would naturally have been the most keenly interested. After a little hesitation, Von Gaden summoned a servant, and the two took Polotsky to a small room at the left of the door, and securing the window, bolted him in and left him to his own reflections. Then the doctor invited us to enter his study, where the tapers were burning, and he had appliances at hand to bandage Lykof's throat. Entering the room in advance, I was startled by an exclamation from Von Gaden, and look-

ing around, saw his eyes fastened with astonishment on the face of Peter Lykof, who was standing before the light, and having dropped his cloak, was revealed in his close-fitting garments, a large muscular man, whose white hair contrasted strongly with his bronzed complexion. Lykof was regarding the Jew with almost a smile on his stern face, and I saw that the side which had escaped the distortion of the scar was handsome. Von Gaden shaded his eyes with his hand, gazing at his visitor in silence until Lykof spoke.

"You recognize me, I see, doctor," he said; "but it is not necessary that others should know me also."

"I understand," exclaimed Von Gaden, grasping his outstretched hand warmly. "I should have known you among a thousand, although it is a long time, and the years have made some changes."

"Sorry ones, I fear," replied the stranger, smiling. "But you should recognize your own handiwork."

The doctor seemed suddenly to recollect his business, and bustled about.

"Sit down," he said, "and I will dress that neck of yours, and then we can have supper."

"It is but a scratch," said Lykof, carelessly, as he unfastened his collar, revealing a gash near the collar-bone which had bled quite freely.

"A bungling stroke," remarked Von Gaden, critically; "the villain is a poor swordsman."

"Yes, fortunately," laughed Lykof, "else I should not be alive to thank M. de Brousson for his timely interference."

"The fellow must have been dogging your footsteps for some time," I said, "for we had followed for quite a distance to see the outcome of the affair."

"It may be that he has followed me all day," Lykof replied. "I have been so absorbed in my own business that I had no thought of such a thing; and Michael was not with me. If he had been —" he laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"There would have been short work," I said; "at least, I should judge so from what I have observed."

"He told me of his mistaken attack upon you, M. le Vicomte," Lykof said with a keen glance, which made my face burn, "and I must apologize for him. The fellow has been infuriated by this villain Polotsky, and longs for his blood. I have no doubt that he will

murder him in the end, and it will be no loss to the community."

"No; that kind of vermin is best removed," Von Gaden rejoined, as he adjusted the plaster on Lykof's wound, and I watched with interest the man's wonderful dexterity.

"What will you do with Polotsky now?" I inquired, not a little curious as to their intentions, for I saw that there was already an understanding between doctor and patient from which I was excluded.

"Let him go," replied Lykof, carelessly; "give him enough rope and he will hang himself."

"After he has sent a few other people out of the world," I replied dryly; and I saw that Von Gaden was surprised at his friend's indifference.

"I would not let the villain go if I were you," he said, looking earnestly at Lykof, as if endeavoring to fathom his motive.

"This rogue is so insignificant that I do not care about him," returned the other, calmly. "I would rather set my snare for a greater rascal — that we know of."

"It seems to me a constant menace to your own safety to let yonder fellow loose," I remarked. "He is indeed insignificant, but none the less a mischievous rogue, and one who

strikes in the back. I would rather end the matter with a bullet than let him go at large."

"It is at least the wiser course to keep him a close prisoner," Von Gaden said, with a certain air of deference, however, as if willing to yield his opinion to Lykof's, — a manner that was unusual with the doctor, a man of strong will and quick decision.

But while we were thus discussing the matter, it was already settled. The prisoner had found a satisfactory solution of the problem. Von Gaden's confidential servant came running to the door, much out of breath and visibly alarmed.

"A word with you, master," he said in German.

"What is it, fellow?" asked the doctor, sharply, turning on him as if he suspected his errand.

"The prisoner has escaped, sir," he stammered, looking thoroughly frightened at the displeasure gathering in his master's eye.

"You villain!" exclaimed Von Gaden, angrily. "Could you not watch an assassin closer?"

The poor man faltered a thousand excuses, overwhelmed with his own culpability. Lykof did not understand German, but when the situation was explained to him, he laughed.

"There is no longer any need to discuss the wisdom of retaining this prisoner," he said.

Von Gaden questioned his servant, and found that the man's suspicion had been aroused by a sudden cessation of all sound in the temporary prison where Polotsky had been confined; and examining the place through the keyhole, he had felt the fresh air, and immediately unbolted the door, found that, in some ingenious way, the prisoner had unfastened the window and leaped into the street. He went outside at once, but found no trace of the fugitive. Von Gaden was not only annoyed, but mortified at what he deemed his own carelessness; but Lykof tried to set his mind at rest, evidently regarding the escape as a joke at the expense of the Jew, and he remarked that it would not be difficult to discover the fugitive, as he was certain to return to Ramodanofsky's house. I observed that Lykof seemed rather to relish the idea of going there in search of him. Von Gaden, on the contrary, liked the prospect less and less, and blamed himself not a little for the easy escape of the captive.

"I will not trust to such securities again," he muttered; "if I had taken him to my laboratory, I could have kept him fast enough!"

CHAPTER IX.

SOPHIA ALEXEIEVNA.

WHILE we were still conversing, there was a noise in the hall, and I heard a familiar voice. In a moment, the doctor's man told me that my attendant wished to speak with me. I found Pierrot by the outer door, looking much disturbed and not a little important,—his way when employed on confidential business. I was annoyed at him for following me to Von Gaden's house.

“What brings you here?” I asked, a trifle sharply.

“A message from the Kremlin, M. le Vicomte,” he said at once, in a low tone. “The messenger is waiting at your apartments now.”

Going through my private papers, I thought immediately, knowing Russian methods.

“Why did you not wait for me to return, you knave?” I said, half angrily; “you know bet-

ter than to leave a stranger at large in my rooms."

Pierrot held up some keys. "He is locked in the hall, M. le Vicomte," he said calmly. "I took that precaution."

"Locked out the imperial messenger!" I exclaimed, aghast. "What trouble will you make next, you blockhead?"

But I could not forbear laughing. The thought of the messenger locked in the narrow hall, while Pierrot gravely departed with the keys, was exquisitely ridiculous.

I made a hasty apology to Von Gaden, and hurried away with my attendant. My curiosity was roused, for I could not imagine what had prompted a summons to the Kremlin at that hour, and from one of the imperial family. A hundred possibilities flashed through my head; but the only one that seemed likely was that some news had arrived from my government which required my immediate attention; and yet the diplomatic relations were not so intimate as to make even that probable. The distance from my house to Von Gaden's was not great, and I hastened my steps the more because of Pierrot's peculiar reception of the envoy. I found him sitting stiffly in the hall, evidently angry at the treatment he had received, but

willing to accept my apology on the ground of my man's stupidity. It was one of the Czarevna Sophia's gentlemen-in-waiting, and he was the bearer of a verbal message from the princess, requesting my immediate attendance at the palace. I was much surprised, but prepared at once to accompany him; my dress had been a little disordered by the skirmish with the assassin, and I had to make some slight changes before I could present myself at the Kremlin. However, in a quarter of an hour we were on the way, having left Pierrot with an expression of gloomy apprehension on his face; for he had no confidence in the good faith of the Russians, and seemed to live in anticipation of a dreadful fate. The czarevna's messenger treated me with a deference that argued that he, at least, fancied my errand to be one of importance; but he seemed especially anxious to avoid conversation, and I could not blame him, for I knew that the state of affairs was such as to make any wise man hold his tongue, for it was dangerous to declare adherence to either the Miloslavskys or the Naryshkins at that time. As we approached the Gate of Saint Nicholas of Mojaïsk, my companion left me for a few moments to speak to three men who were leaving it; they con-

versed in low tones, and with great earnestness. A little observation convinced me that they were Streltsi, and here was another straw to show which way the wind was blowing. In a few moments my guide rejoined me, and there were traces of agitation in his manner. The anterooms of the palace were almost deserted when we entered, and he hurried me towards the apartments of the czarevnas. I was ushered into a vacant guardroom of the *Terem*, and left to await the pleasure of the princess. In the quarter of an hour that ensued, my meditations were peculiar; I had given up trying to conjecture the cause of the summons, and waited with what patience I could command. I examined the apartment with some curiosity, for it was unusual for a stranger to gain admittance within these precincts, and impossible before the time of the Czarina Natalia; Alexis' affection for his young bride, who had been brought up by Matveief's Scotch wife, had allowed her a freedom before unknown in the imperial household, where it had been a criminal offence to meet the czarina unveiled. Two windows of the room looked down upon the Red Place, so that the inmates had ample opportunity to observe the occurrences without; the interior was furnished in the rich Oriental fashion, and

was evidently no longer occupied by the guards, but had probably been added to Sophia's suite of apartments. I had always felt a good deal of curiosity about this princess, who had so overshadowed her sisters and her blind brother, Ivan. She had shared her brother Feodor's education, and had taken advantage of all the liberty so lately given to the women of the czar's family, during Feodor's illness taking a prominent part in affairs of State, putting aside the last formalities which hedged in the imperial household; therefore, I was not surprised when the door opened at last to see her enter alone.

Sophia Alexeievna at that time was still a young woman, but exceedingly stout, her short figure being crowned by an enormous head, out of all proportion even to the bulky body, and the Russian dress of the day increased her appearance of flesh, falling, as it did, a long full robe from the throat to the feet; that night, it was black, edged with sable, and embroidered with silver. She was an extremely plain woman, but there was an imperial dignity in her bearing which counterbalanced the effect of her proportions, and her small eyes were keen and penetrating, with a glance at once haughty and unflinching. Yet there was a charm about the czarevna's manner when she

wished to please, and her voice could be exceedingly pleasant and winning.

She came forward now to a table in the center of the room, and signed to me to approach, which I did with a profound obeisance. My curiosity was thoroughly roused, and, moreover, I felt a strong desire to secure the friendship of this remarkable woman. She had learned enough French to address me by name without hesitation, but beyond that she spoke in Russian, which was fortunately as familiar to me as my mother tongue.

"M. le Vicomte," she said pleasantly, "you are doubtless surprised at this arbitrary summons; but we have learned to look upon you as a friend of our late brother, the martyred czar, and we felt that we could rely upon your kindness and your discretion to execute a—" Sophia hesitated, and I fancied she was deciding what shade of importance to give to her request, "a delicate mission for us at this time, when we cannot easily spare one of our own trusted relatives."

It was my turn to hesitate a little, for I was not willing to commit myself blindly to the performance of some secret mission.

"Your highness can rely on my friendship and discretion," I murmured, "and it would

give me pleasure to do any reasonable service for any of the imperial family."

The czarevna cast a keen glance at me as if she thought my reply a little ambiguous, but was far too astute to show any doubt of my fidelity.

"The service I ask is trifling," she said calmly, lying as coolly as I ever heard any woman lie in my life, for I knew that no man was summoned at that hour to the Kremlin for a trifle; but I forgave her the lie, for the sake of the grace with which she told it.

"If your highness will instruct me as to the nature of the errand," I began, stammering a little, for I was in a dilemma, not desiring to offend either faction, and knowing that I was treading on a mine which was liable to explode under the pressure of my heel. I thought that she was rather enjoying my discomfiture, for I saw a gleam of amusement in her alert eyes, and she had the most painfully alert glance that it has ever been my destiny to endeavor to evade.

"M. le Vicomte," she said with a smile, and an air of bland candor, "I know well that I am calling upon a stranger for a personal service, and that you do not owe me the allegiance of a subject; but," she added with perfect grace

of manner, “you are a French gentleman, and I know your reputation for gallantry; therefore consider me, monsieur, as only a woman asking a friendly service at your hands, and forget that I am a czarevna of Russia, and a sister of the unhappy czarevitch.”

She could hardly have placed me in a more awkward predicament; I saw at once that a refusal would be a deadly offense, and I had heard that Sophia's memory was long. There was no alternative but to meet the exigency with what grace I could summon to my aid.

“It is too much honor,” I said, bowing low, and feeling that it was indeed a greater honor than I desired, “and I am sure that there can be no doubt of my readiness to serve your highness at all times.”

“Alas, M. le Vicomte,” Sophia replied with a heavy sigh, “we scarcely know where to look for true friends now. The election of the younger czarevitch dashed our hopes to the ground, and we can but look with despair upon our elder brother, set aside in favor of a child of ten! In the hour of prosperity, friends are plentiful indeed; but when an ill wind blows, the ship is soon deserted. We poor orphans are indeed desolate. Therefore,” she added, with a sudden change from melancholy to gra-

ciousness, "we value more a token of your disinterested kindness. I will ask but a small service, monsieur; there is a little packet here that I would have delivered to-night, and I am at loss to find a trusty messenger. One of our own people might be apprehended, but you, M. de Brousson, could deliver it without hurt and without suspicion."

I was not afraid of any risk except that which seemed imminent of being involved in some of the Miloslavskys' schemes. If I had been at that time acting as an envoy of the French king, I could have evaded the czarevna's importunity; but my diplomatic mission was long ago concluded, and I was in Russia on my own responsibility, and was aware that she knew it; nevertheless, I was in a fever of embarrassment. I stammered something about being too blunt a man to execute political errands; but the princess swept aside my objection with an ease that I could not but admire, while I chafed under it. She had me in her toils, and I saw that escape was impossible. She had already lifted the packet, which was a small one, from the table, and was examining the seals before handing it to me.

"You will do me a personal service, M. le Vicomte," she said sweetly, "and one that

Sophia will never forget. You need only to conceal this about your person and deliver it, with what speed you can, to Prince Basil Galitsyn, who is outside the city now, at the house of the Boyar Urusof. It is important that he receive these papers to-night."

I started when I heard the mention of Galitsyn's name, for it was rumored that the great czarevna loved this handsome prince. Galitsyn was a descendant of the Lithuanian monarchs, and belonged to one of the most illustrious families in Russia, besides being a man of attainments and of a dignified presence. I knew at once that my errand was of importance, and suspected that the messenger would be watched, and therefore the shrewd czarevna had selected a foreigner who was certain to escape suspicion. I received the packet from her hands with a reluctance that it was difficult to conceal. However, there are none so blind as those who do not desire to see, and Sophia feigned ignorance of my embarrassment. She took the pains to give me minute directions about the route to Urusof's villa, and offered to supply me with a horse. But I declined the offer, for two obvious reasons: first, I preferred my own animal on a journey on a bad road at night; second, I knew that to have a

horse brought from the imperial stables at that hour for me would attract attention, even if it did not arouse suspicion.

"You will find Prince Galitsyn," Sophia said in conclusion, when she was dismissing me, "and deliver this packet into his own hands, and so earn my grateful thanks."

And she extended her hand with a smile that on a more beautiful face would have been captivating. I made my obeisance, and departed with as good a grace as I could assume, while my heart was like lead, for I had no relish for my errand and a deep-rooted distrust of the smiling czarevna, who I fancied would walk to power over her fallen friends with the same cheerful aspect. As I left the apartment, I stumbled on the recumbent form of one of the court dwarfs, who had been lying outside the door. I was not a little disconcerted to find that it was Homyak, for whom I had conceived a dislike as strong as that felt by Von Gaden. However, a glance at his face satisfied me that he had been napping, and was in a very ill humor at being disturbed. He snarled out something about walking over a man as if he were a toad, and curled himself down again, like a huge house dog, on the door-sill, while I hurried through the anterooms, only anxious to avoid

notice, and with the czarevna's packet concealed in my bosom. When I reached the Red Staircase, I loosened my sword in the scabbard, and hastened my step as I walked across the Red Place and towards the Gate of the Redeemer.

CHAPTER X.

THE PACKET.

I WENT directly to my own quarters and ordered Pierrot to have my horse saddled, while I put on my riding boots and loaded my pistols. I had no taste for my errand, but was determined to execute it faithfully, and with all possible speed. To my astonishment, Pierrot reappeared booted and spurred for the ride. I eyed him with anger.

"Who required your attendance?" I asked sharply.

An obstinate expression came over the man's honest face.

"M. le Vicomte," he said solemnly, "the city is in a turmoil, and you may need my sword, even if you do not care for my attendance."

"Pshaw, Pierrot!" I replied, more pleasantly, "they are too busy preparing to cut each other's throats to care to cut mine."

"I know not how that may be, monsieur," he rejoined stubbornly; "but I do know that the serfs are all ready to rise if the Streltsi mutiny, and there is no one here to care whether our throats are cut or not, so we must even look after them ourselves."

"Well, look after yours, my good man," I said carelessly, "and trust me to take care of my own."

Pierrot stood hesitating for a moment; I saw that he was by no means silenced, but pretended not to observe him while I fastened my belt with the pistols in it and adjusted my cloak, receiving very little assistance from him. I had turned to leave the room when he touched my sleeve. I stopped impatiently, but something in his eyes checked my anger.

"What is it now, you persistent knave?" I asked, conscious that my resolution was weakening before his obstinate devotion.

"M. le Vicomte," he said gravely, "I have served you faithfully for many years; my father served yours, before me. I pray you, let me share your peril, if I may not avert it."

I was deeply touched, but passed it off lightly. "Nonsense, man!" I said; "you make a mountain out of a molehill. I am in no danger; but since you are so obstinate, have your

way, but we have the prospect of a hard ride, and little risk to vary the monotony."

The foolish fellow thanked me as if I had conferred a great favor, and in a few moments we were in the saddle, and walking our horses down the narrow streets, which were dark enough to enforce a little caution. It was now late, and events had so crowded upon each other, that it seemed to me that it must be nearer morning than it really was. The city was not as quiet as usual at that hour; heavy sounds smote the ear, and the hum of some distant noise coming from the direction of the quarters of the Streltsi. We were riding through the Zemlianui-gorod towards the suburbs, where I was to find the house of the Boyar Urusof. The moon was entirely obscured now, and it was so dark that it required all my attention to guide my horse along the indifferent road, — Pierrot keeping close in my wake and, contrary to his custom, offering no suggestions about our journey, feeling perhaps that he accompanied me only on sufferance. As we traversed the narrow streets, I had ample time for reflection, and the more my mind dwelt on my errand, the less it pleased me. Up to this time, I had been able to keep clear of any entanglement with the court intrigues, thus maintaining

pleasant relations at the palace; but now I was fairly committed to the Miloslavskys, for if the fact that I had accepted such a mission reached the ears of the Czarina Natalia, I could look for little toleration from her; and if the Naryshkin party maintained their supremacy, my place at court would not be tenable, and it would be impossible for me to reach Zénaïde Ramodanofsky. Yet I had been forced into my predicament, having no choice in the matter. My thoughts of the Czarevna Sophia were scarcely pleasant ones; but my only hope was that she would be victorious, and my errand would then be vindicated. I confess, too, to considerable curiosity about the packet that I carried. I could not doubt its importance, and wondered to what extent she had trusted me.

These reflections were interrupted by Pierrot, who asked which of two roads I intended to follow. I had already decided on the shorter one; but he objected, on the ground that he knew it to be in bad condition, and that our horses might meet with an accident. However, I was too anxious to be done with my distasteful errand to heed his precautions, and in a few moments we were riding on again, carefully, it is true, but yet at a fair rate of speed.

We had advanced a considerable distance, when I thought that I heard a commotion of some kind in front, and, at the same time, there was the sound of a horse's hoofs coming rapidly towards us. In the darkness, I could only discover an imperfect outline of a horse and rider as they approached me. I turned aside to make room, but the stranger reined in his horse as he came abreast of us. He uttered an exclamation in Russian which I did not catch, and I asked him what he had said.

"You cannot go on!" he exclaimed, in an excited tone; "there is a small riot on the road. Some of the Streltsi have got after one of their officers and taken him prisoner, and they will not let any one through the lines. I am going back to the city for help."

"Will they murder him?" I asked, feeling that we ought to interfere.

"No; they are going to take him to their own quarters," the stranger said, touching his horse with his spurs.

I called after him to know if there was any short cut to the other road, which I had despised. He replied that he did not know, but that there was a public house a few yards in front of me, where I could get all the information that I required. If it had not been for

the czarevna's packet, I should have been inclined to risk getting through the rioters; but I knew it would be a sorry matter to fall into their hands with that imperial missive on my person. I foresaw some difficulty and delay as it was, and cursing my luck, rode forward to the house indicated by the stranger. It was a long, low building surrounded by a high wall; there was no light at the front, but I saw one burning in the rear, inside the courtyard, and the gate was ajar. Tossing my reins to Pierrot, I dismounted, and approaching the gateway, looked into a large bare court, partially illuminated by the light streaming from an open door opposite. I knocked with the hilt of my sword, but there was no sound but the restive plunge of one of my own horses; I looked back and saw Pierrot trying to quiet them. As there was no response, I pushed open the gate, which squeaked angrily, as if the hinges were rusted. Crossing the court, I was approaching the open door, when the light was suddenly extinguished. My surprise stayed my foot, for I was left in total darkness, and without having seen any one in the place. In another moment I advanced to the doorway and struck the post with my fist. I heard the sound of feet moving within, and bending forward, strained my eyes to pene-

trate the darkness. As I did so, some one sprang on me from behind, and I was thrown heavily face downward on the step; before I could make any outcry, my head was muffled by my first assailant, while another person kept my arms pinioned. I made a violent effort to free myself, but was perfectly powerless in the hands of the ruffians, who did their work silently, although I thought that I could hear, even through my muffling, the sound of a number of feet. I remembered, at that moment, with regret that I had not heeded Pierrot's cautions, and still hoped that he might take alarm and come to my assistance; but the height of the wall precluded all possibility of seeing into the court, even in the daylight, and in that pitch darkness only an owl could have discovered anything. My mysterious assailants evidently had some well-defined plan in their minds; for without consultation, or even speaking, they proceeded to lift me, none too gently, and carried me into the house. However, they did not stop there; but passing on, I heard a heavy door unbarred, and from the change of atmosphere, was sure that I was out of doors again. Then I became conscious of being lifted into a carriage, and could indistinctly hear the horses prancing as we started off at a rate that

argued a better road than that by which I had approached the ill-fated spot. The cords which bound my arms and legs hurt not a little, and, muffled as I was, I found it even difficult to breathe. My thoughts were too confused to reason out the cause or probable results of my unfortunate predicament, but I was greatly alarmed for the safety of the czarevna's packet. Even if their object was robbery alone, they would still be sure to discover the papers, and would doubtless make use of them; but from the first, I fancied that the packet was the cause of my trouble, and yet was at loss to understand how it could have been suspected that I was the bearer of Sophia's messages. Suddenly I remembered Homyak at the door of the czarevna's apartment, and knew myself for a blockhead. Von Gaden had openly expressed his antipathy to the miserable dwarf, and I knew him to be identified with Vladimir Ramodanofsky, an active adherent of the Naryshkins. My carelessness had been my own undoing, and I now suspected that the story of the riotous Streltsi on the road was a fable, and that I had been led into a snare as easily as the veriest simpleton in the world. Poor Pierrot! I fancied his distress, and only hoped that his fate might not be worse than my own. Meanwhile, the

packet still remained upon my person, and I lay helpless in the bottom of the carriage. On, on, we sped! What could be our destination? The cords cut more and more about my limbs, and my breath came with an effort. I felt that a few moments more of this would strangle me. I endeavored to gain some liberty by contortions of my whole body; but after a few spasmodic movements, I received a sharp kick in the ribs from one of my captors, and found it expedient to lie still. The sensation of smothering was horrible, the oppression on the chest, the pain at the heart; and every movement was torture. Reaching at last the limit of endurance, I lost consciousness, and knew nothing more until I came to myself, on the floor of a small room, my eyes straining up at the low ceiling, and the morning light streaming in at a window opposite.

At the first awakening I remembered nothing, and was vaguely astonished at my strange surroundings. Then, suddenly recollecting what had occurred, I sat up, finding, at the same time, that I was very sore and stiff. The cords had been removed, and my clothes were open at the throat, so that I suspected that there had been some difficulty in reviving me at all. Remembering the czarevna's packet, I

felt for it, only to find it gone. Then I looked to see if I had been robbed; but no, — to my astonishment, my money was untouched, down to the last livre, only the ring from my finger — my signet — was gone. My sword and pistols had shared the fate of the packet. It was not difficult to draw conclusions. The czarevna's precautions had been futile, and I had been tracked from the Kremlin, falling, as I was forced to acknowledge to myself, an easy victim into the hands of the enemy. My reflections were extremely bitter; not only had I failed to execute my trust, but was probably a ruined man. An account of this affair reaching Versailles would scarcely redound to my credit; and if it was as serious as I had every reason to fear, it would cut short my career. I could never again expect to enjoy the confidence of Louvois, at that time virtually prime minister of France, or of my sovereign, for the great Louis grasped every detail of affairs, and even my ill-fated gallantry was not likely to escape that eagle eye. As for the Czarevna Sophia, I was conscious of a miserable desire to escape from future encounter with that princess! I sat for a long time in the middle of the floor in a kind of stupor, partly the result of my experience, and partly caused by my forlorn reflec-

tions. But after a while I roused myself, and finding that the door was securely fastened without, went to the window to discover the prospect there.

It was far too high from the ground to offer any means of escape, so that at first I felt my position to be hopeless. It looked down upon a courtyard, and was in the wing of a large house. My first glance gave me no comfort, but my second reassured me; there was a strange familiarity about the place, and leaning out I looked down, and discovered far below a postern in this wing, close to the main building, and then was sure of my recognition; it must be the house of Ramodanofsky. A closer examination of the building satisfied me. If I had not fancied it impossible, I should have recognized the place at once. I was no longer downcast, but, strange to say, elated at the thought of being a prisoner in a room that must be directly over those of Zénaïde Feodorovna. I set about at once devising some means of acquainting Mademoiselle Eudoxie with my predicament. At first it seemed a nearly impossible task, and then I hit upon an experiment which was at least worth a trial. Taking two handkerchiefs and tearing them in strips, I knotted and twisted them into a

string of considerable length, and weighting it with my belt, let it cautiously down from my window, until it swung to and fro like a pendulum before the casement directly beneath mine.

CHAPTER XI.

THE RESCUE.

THERE was so large an element of chance about my experiment that I watched the dangling belt with the interest of a gambler. It might very easily attract the notice of the inmate of the room below, but would that be Mademoiselle Eudoxie? I knew that the room in which she slept had a window opening on the opposite side upon the street, for it was at that window that she was to place her signal in the event of requiring my services. It was a strange reverse of circumstance, that I should be signaling for her help at another spot in the same house. I had lowered my flag of distress until it was directly in front of the window, and the heavy belt, with its silver fastenings, was too conspicuous to escape the notice of some one, friend or foe. I waited for a while, in painful suspense, leaning out over the sill, and looking down at the slowly vibrating signal, all

the while hoping to see Mademoiselle Eudoxie's thin face and sportive gray curls appear below.

At last my uncertainty was ended, but not by the expected vision. Instead, a light-haired, fair-faced girl looked up in genuine astonishment, and Zénaïde's eyes met mine. She was at first too surprised to do more than gaze at me in perfect bewilderment, and I returned her regard with a stupid amazement. For some reason I had not thought of arousing Zénaïde. She was the first to recover herself, and apparently comprehended something of the situation. She withdrew, and almost immediately Mademoiselle Eudoxie really did look up; and even in that predicament I could scarcely restrain a smile at her evident horror and alarm. She signed to me that they understood, and then her head also vanished, and I withdrew my singular signal, fearing that it might attract the attention of less friendly eyes.

There was nothing to be done now but to await developments, which I did with all the patience I could command. It was some little time before I heard light steps outside my door; and after some fumbling with the fastenings, it was thrown open, revealing Zénaïde upon the threshold, and mademoiselle looking over her shoulder with an expression of astonishment

difficult to describe. I was conscious of cutting a sorry figure, for I must have borne the marks of the hard usage of the previous night. Zénaïde did not seem to require any explanation of my presence, probably imagining that it was due to some of her uncle's violence; but to mademoiselle I had to make a lengthy statement, which had the effect of turning her surprise to alarm.

"Zénaïde, dear, we must get him right out!" she cried nervously. "It is a great risk to delay a moment. Your uncle — the servants —"

Zénaïde glanced at her with that kind of scorn that a strong nature feels for a weak one.

"You forget, dear mademoiselle," she said calmly, "that my uncle is indisposed to-day; has been so since the czar's funeral, and the serfs will not interfere with me," she added, with a certain hauteur which became her well, and which evidently revived the sinking spirits of the older woman. It was plain that she was in the habit of relying on the young girl's strength of will rather than on her own.

"Nevertheless, Mademoiselle Ramodanofsky," I said earnestly, "I must escape as soon as possible, for I was the bearer of an important

packet, and know not how serious may be the consequences of its loss."

She looked at me anxiously, the danger of my situation seeming to have surmounted her first embarrassment, so that she spoke to and regarded me as an old friend rather than a new admirer.

"A packet, M. de Brousson," she said thoughtfully; "it may be that I know something of it," and she questioned me about its size and appearance, listening attentively to my description.

"That packet only left this house an hour since," she said. "I was in attendance upon my uncle, and saw him give it to a dwarf just as I was leaving the room."

I questioned her eagerly, and was soon assured that the dwarf was none other than the eavesdropper Homyak, and my heart sank as I divined the probable destination of the czar evna's packet, and pictured her anger and consternation; for of course it would reach the hands of the Czarina Natalia.

While Zénaïde talked to me about the dwarf, Mademoiselle Eudoxie hovered at the door of the apartment like a frightened mother bird trying to guard the young ones from the marauder; and as soon as there was a pause, she recurred to her first exclamation.

"We must get him out, Zénaïde!" she said, wringing her hands; "we must get him out at once!"

"Is there any reason to prevent me from going directly down the stairs and out, the way I did the other evening?" I asked.

"Many reasons," Zénaïde answered quietly. "You are unarmed, and you would never reach the gate of the courtyard."

I began to share mademoiselle's evident anxiety. We all three gazed at each other in perplexity, only Zénaïde's face expressed a keen thoughtfulness that reassured me. I felt that she had all a woman's delicate intuition and a lively intelligence.

"There is only one way," she said at last, glancing with a smile from Mademoiselle Eudoxie's tall, angular form to mine; "it is fortunate that mademoiselle is so tall."

I began to divine her project, and my cheek burned. I knew how keen was a girl's sense of the ridiculous, and it was my last wish to appear absurd before Zénaïde Feodorovna.

"Mademoiselle Eudoxie," she said, speaking with the assured tone of one whose resolution is formed, "take M. de Brousson down to your apartments, and give him your long mantle and hood and veil, and I will order the car-

riage for you. You understand, you are ill, and require a consultation with the doctor, and old Konrat can drive the coach."

"Capital! capital!" exclaimed mademoiselle, clapping her hands with the glee of a child. "You are a witch, Zénaïde! Follow me, Monsieur Philippe; we have no time to lose."

I protested. I grew hot at the thought of figuring before Zénaïde in petticoats and cloak, like an old woman; but they would not listen to my objections, and finally I reflected that liberty was sweet, even at the cost of a little laughter at my expense, and it was sweeter still to owe it to Zénaïde. So I was smuggled down the stairs into a little anteroom, off Mademoiselle Eudoxie's quarters, and there left to array myself in a petticoat and hooded mantle. I took much time to do it, being utterly confounded by the multitude of strings and buttons, and feeling myself a fool for my pains. Having finally completed my toilet, to my great confusion, and tapped on mademoiselle's door, she opened it and bade me enter her boudoir. Zénaïde was there also, and both women viewed me for a moment in silence, and then Zénaïde gave way to mirth. Her laughter, although musical enough, struck a discord on my ear at that moment.

"Pardon me, M. le Vicomte," she said, her fair face flushed with merriment and her beautiful eyes dancing, "but oh, mademoiselle, look — look at his feet!"

I looked down with a feeling of utter helplessness, and to my consternation saw that mademoiselle's petticoat came only half way between knee and ankle, and my booted and spurred feet were in evidence below the too scanty skirt. Even mademoiselle laughed as she realized the effect of my figure, but she was quicker in conceiving a remedy than she had been in contriving an escape. The old woman approached me with the air of a mother about to adjust the clothing of a child, and with a few dexterous touches managed to loosen strings and fasten with pins until the skirt fell over my feet; and, at Zénaïde's suggestion, she removed my spurs. Then muffling my face in a veil and adjusting my hood, with the air of bestowing a benediction upon the enterprise, Mademoiselle Eudoxie finally handed me over to her pupil's guidance, while she retired, to remain in concealment until the successful execution of our plot.

Left alone with Zénaïde, I secretly fumed at my absurd appearance, and the necessity for caution. Here was my first opportunity to talk

alone to the object of my devotion, and I was absurdly dressed in an old woman's mantle and petticoat and half suffocated with this atrocity of a veil. I began to realize the difficulties which beset a woman, and to admire the intrepidity of spirit that can not only endure such garments, but do more than that,—resemble an angel in them! Whether or not Zénaïde appreciated my misery I am not sure, but she had sufficient forbearance to restrain her mirth and reply to my remarks with suitable gravity, although more than once I fancied that I saw a gleam of mischief in the blue eyes as they rested upon me. Her manner was demureness itself, and she conducted me through the ante-room and along the hall without a word. As we were descending the stairs, we encountered two servant-maids coming up, and Zénaïde explained to them that Mademoiselle Eudoxie was indisposed and was going to the doctor's. I noticed that they both regarded me with a slightly bewildered air; but my fair guide passed them as if they were not worth a thought, and I followed as well as I could, but found my petticoats even more difficult to manage than I had supposed. When we reached the lower floor, Zénaïde led me into a small room to await the arrival of the carriage, and going to

an escritoire in the corner, she took out a pistol, and after a glance at it, handed it to me.

"It may be that you will have need of it, M. le Vicomte," she said gravely. "It is loaded; conceal it under your cloak."

"Is it yours, mademoiselle?" I asked quickly, for something in her manner made me divine the truth.

She bowed her head in assent. "It was my father's; he brought the two from France."

I pressed it back, but she waved her hand.

"Keep it, monsieur," she said simply, "I have the mate."

"You are never without arms then, mademoiselle?" I said.

She glanced at me searchingly, and instantly I remembered Von Gaden's remark that she had her father's spirit. There was something about her mouth which suggested the quick decision and unfaltering resolution that properly belong to the sterner sex.

"I am never unprepared for the worst, M. de Brousson," she replied calmly. "I have neither father nor mother nor brother to protect me. I am an orphan, and here in Russia a girl has little freedom of choice."

"Pardon me, mademoiselle," I said, strongly

moved, "I have learned that your uncle is forcing an unwelcome marriage upon you; are you in any danger of being compelled to submission?"

The color blazed on the delicate cheek, and for a moment I saw pride struggling with a weaker feeling; then her eyes filled with tears, and she clasped her hands together in an effort to maintain her composure.

"I cannot be forced into that marriage, monsieur," she said in a low voice, "for I can die."

"Mademoiselle!" I cried out, "is it as bad as that?"

She bent her head, and I saw the tears glistening on her eyelashes. I forgot my situation, I forgot my absurd guise, and in a moment I was kneeling beside her, with one of her hands clasped in mine.

"Mademoiselle Zénaïde," I said, in a low voice, "he shall never so sacrifice you while I live. There is one sword always at your service."

Her beautiful face was crimson with embarrassment, and her hand fluttered in my detaining clasp; but I saw that she was deeply touched, even if half frightened at my vehemence.

"Alas, M. le Vicomte," she exclaimed, looking at me sorrowfully, "what could you do

among so many? How could you oppose my uncle?"

Remembering the lost packet and Sophia's probable displeasure, I was a little nonplussed myself.

"I would find some way to save you!" I exclaimed. "For my king's sake, I am privileged at court, and I would appeal to the czar."

"Ah, no!" she said, at once losing hope, "you forget that the man whom my uncle has selected is a cousin of the Czar Peter."

"It matters not!" I exclaimed desperately, "I would find a way; your uncle has no right to barter your happiness."

She smiled bitterly. "A young girl's happiness is not often considered," she said; "sometimes I think it is better to be old and ugly like Mademoiselle Eudoxie, since no one could desire to marry her."

"Never regret being beautiful, mademoiselle," I said impulsively, "since you can give happiness by merely smiling upon the rest of us poor mortals!"

"Hush!" she exclaimed, "I hear a footstep. Arise, M. le Vicomte. If the door is opened now, you are betrayed."

"I will not rise until I have thanked you," I replied gallantly, "for it is to you I owe my

liberty, perhaps my life, and, mademoiselle, I find the debt a sweet one."

"It is nothing," she cried hurriedly; "but if you do not rise, monsieur, you will betray me, and bring down a deluge on my head."

At this I stumbled awkwardly to my feet, and she, seeming to feel that she had been hasty, held out her hand with a blush and a smile, and as I pressed it to my lips, she spoke to me in a sweet and slightly faltering tone.

"I thank you," she said, "for your sympathy. I am a lonely orphan, and your friendship for mademoiselle and me is peculiarly valuable to us. But alas! I am too carefully guarded for a stranger to help me; therefore, go, monsieur, and forget me, though I shall remember always your thought for my fate."

I flung back my head. "Mademoiselle," I said steadfastly, "I will neither forget you nor fail you; in your hour of need I will—"

I know not how much more I would have said, for she was listening with downcast and blushing face; but, at this moment, a lackey announced the carriage, and I was forced to make an awkward exit, Zénaïde giving all the directions for me.

"Mademoiselle Eudoxie cannot speak clearly," she said serenely; "she has a severe toothache.

Konrat, drive directly to Dr. von Gaden's house and leaving mademoiselle there, return and report to me. *Au revoir*, mademoiselle, and may your tooth be soon quieted."

And the carriage drove slowly out of the court, leaving her standing on the doorstep, with the rare Russian sunlight touching her golden hair, and a blush like a rose on her fair young cheek.

CHAPTER XII.

PRAVEZH.¹

I WAS not a little thankful when the carriage stopped at Von Gaden's door and I got out at last; nearly falling as I did so, for my skirts became involved in the wheel, displaying, I fear, a masculine leg; however, I saw the coach drive off sedately with Konrat, as stoical as at first, holding the reins. Dr. von Gaden's servant looked a little perplexed when he saw me standing at the door, but ushered me into the doctor's consulting-room, saying that he expected Von Gaden every moment. As soon as I was alone, I began to remove my disguise, and had just thrown aside my veil and hood when the Jew opened the door. He stood transfixed on the threshold for a moment, and then, as he comprehended the situation, a smile illuminated his grave face.

“Poor Pierrot!” he exclaimed at once, “I must notify him; the man has been beside himself.”

¹ Public flogging or torture.

My conscience smote me that I had never once thought of the poor fellow.

"Where is he?" I inquired, as I proceeded hastily to divest myself of my petticoats, for I was anxious to feel like a man once more.

"He is scouring Moscow," Von Gaden said; "he came here, towards morning, and told me that you had gone into a courtyard to make an inquiry and had never come out, and when he followed and searched, he found the court and house both deserted. I have been twice to the palace to petition for aid in the search for you, and Pierrot is like one possessed. Tell me, man, how came you here, and in this garb?"

I gave him, as briefly as I could, the history of my adventure, and saw that his keen mind at once grasped the serious phase of the situation. He looked at me gravely.

"Homyak took the packet?" he repeated thoughtfully, as I concluded. "A sorry messenger, but an old tool of Ramodanofsky's. I saw the dwarf, not a half-hour since, going towards the Streltsi quarters. I wonder," he added musingly, "if he had already delivered his packet, or was drawn away from his errand to feast his eyes upon that disgusting scene. You have come back upon an event-

ful day, M. de Brousson; to-day, the officers of the Streltsi will be subjected to the *pravezsh.*"

"Is it possible that the Streltsi have carried that point?" I exclaimed in surprise. "That means mutiny."

The doctor bowed his head gravely.

"It means," he said, "that the government is not strong enough to resist a force of twenty-two thousand men, the only disciplined force in Russia to-day. The officers are to be scourged in the quarters of the Streltsi, and there is intense excitement in the city and at the Kremlin."

"This is hideous!" I exclaimed. "Who are the officers?"

Von Gaden gave me a list of names.

"Colonels Griboyedof and Karandeyef will be scourged with the knout, twelve others with rods. The Streltsi will regulate the severity of the punishment, and after suffering this degradation," he added, "the officers will be allowed to go to their country places, in disgrace, when they have paid back all the money claimed by the soldiers."

"And the Streltsi will look for fresh excitement," I said.

"Even so," replied Von Gaden, gravely; "it

is the beginning of the end, and woe to the hand that unchains the wild beast!"

While we were talking, I had fastened Zénaïde's pistol in my belt, and I now asked the doctor for a sword and a cloak.

"Where are you going?" he inquired, while complying with my request.

"In search of Homyak," I replied briefly; "and failing to find him, I must make my peace with the czarevna."

"You will find Homyak gloating over the scourging," Von Gaden said; "but I fear it will be less easy to make peace with the princess: she is a true daughter of a czar, and nothing if not a tyrant born."

"You have no love for Sophia," I remarked, smiling.

Von Gaden shook his head. "My warmest friendship has ever been for the Czarina Natalia," he said quietly. "I knew her as a young girl in her guardian's house. I saw her in the midst of the dangers and intrigues of her early married life, and I see her now fighting steadily for her boy, who, as you and I both know, is the only czarevitch fitted to ascend the throne. No, I do not love the Miloslavskys, for I have seen them day by day playing into the hands of the turbulent soldiers; working by fair means or

by foul — for what? Not to put a blind imbecile on the throne. No, no, but to crown the Czarevna Sophia herself."

I started, although these were only my own conclusions voiced by the Jew.

"Is that the possible climax of the drama?" I asked quickly, thinking with a sensation of despair of the lost packet.

"Possible," he answered slowly, "although difficult. I am glad that the ex-Chancellor Matveief is coming at last. But hasten, M. le Vicomte," he added, rousing himself suddenly, "your errand is best served by speed, and I have delayed you with my own reveries."

Once in the street, I proceeded rapidly towards the quarters of the Streltsi, accompanied thither by the stragglers of the crowd that had preceded me. There was every evidence of intense excitement, and as I came nearer, I was involved in a mass of people struggling and shouting in the effort to approach the scene. It took all my strength to wedge myself into the throng, and then it was still more impossible to guide myself, and I was at the mercy of the mob, and began to regret the foolhardiness that had induced me to seek the dwarf at such a time; but it was equally impossible to retrace my steps. There could be no

stronger evidence of the state of feeling among the masses than was exhibited by this crowd, ripe for any mischief and ferocious at the thought of wreaking vengeance on their superiors. It cost an effort to escape being trampled under foot, and more than one of the weaker ones went down and they passed over them, no one pausing to consider the fate of the unfortunates, for fear of sharing it.

So, pushed and tossed about by these wild beasts, I found myself at last, without any wish of my own, among the spectators of the justice administered by the Streltsi. The soldiers were formed in an immense circle in an open place. In the center of this cruel ring were the executioners with the knout and rods, and one of the officers was stripped to the waist and bound, while the lashes fell with merciless force on his already bleeding back. It was a sickening sight, and the more revolting because of the evident enjoyment of the onlookers. I searched the dark faces near me for a glimmer of mercy, but found none. Only a kind of horrid pleasure gleamed in their eyes. How deep must have been the sting of their wrongs to have excited such hatred! The officer, who was Colonel Gryboyedof, stood the torture with heroic fortitude, and although the blood was running down

his back, uttered no sound. The mob was intensely silent too, as if eager to catch the first moan of pain uttered by the unfortunate man. Even the executioner's arm faltered a little, as if his task was sickening, but a shout of "harder" from the crowd, nerved it to an increased effort. I tried to release myself from the press at the front, and when Gryboyedof fell fainting, my opportunity came, there was a rush forward which somewhat relieved the pressure about me, and I began to extricate myself, and even as I did so, discovered the object of my search. Homyak had evidently seen me in the crowd, and was endeavoring to slip away unobserved. Making a strong effort, I shook myself free and started in pursuit of the rascal. As I did so, fresh cries from behind made me turn, and I could see above the heads of the crowd that they had substituted two fresh victims in the place of the first.

I soon saw that Homyak was endeavoring to get away in the direction of the Ragoshkaya suburbs, and I followed as rapidly as I could. Fortunately, he did not apparently observe my movements now; he looked back once or twice, but each time at the group about the prisoners. It was marvelous to see with what rapidity he

penetrated the crowd, his diminutive stature seeming rather a help than a hindrance, for he dodged under elbows and squeezed through gaps, which defied my greater bulk. However, by the force of perseverance, I managed to keep him in sight, and finally found myself on the outskirts of the mob. The dwarf was possibly fifty yards in advance, and was walking rapidly towards a narrow lane to the right. Being free at last of the press of people, I could follow him with more speed, and soon diminished the distance between us. Fortunately, he no longer looked behind; being out of sight of the scourging, he seemed to give his mind to some other purpose, and sped along, gaining less on me now that the conditions were equal. We plunged into the lane, and soon the hoarse murmur of the crowd and the sharp crack of the lash became less distinctly audible, and we were beyond the last straggler. The place seemed strangely deserted, as the streets of a city always are when some great disturbance has drawn the population to one quarter, draining the streets and alleys and even emptying the houses. Once, a woman looked out of an upper window as I passed, but that was the only face I saw in the whole length of the lane. At the farther end, Homyak paused and fum-

bled at his cloak, seeming to be engaged in searching for something; that stop gave me time to overtake him. I was upon him before he knew it, and he turned a scared, wizened face towards me as I came up. I saw at a glance that his first impulse was to run, but second thought evidently convinced him that I ought to be ignorant of his part in the transaction. He was destined to a rude awakening; the lonely spot suited my purpose, and in a moment I had him by the throat and put my pistol to his head.

“You villain!” I exclaimed angrily, my remembrance of the previous night increasing my wrath. “Give up that packet as you value your miserable life.”

The dwarf was an abject coward, and he writhed in my hands in an agony of terror, his whole face distorted.

“Have mercy!” he whimpered. “I know nothing of any packet. I am a poor, honest man, and not able to resist you.”

I pressed the muzzle of my pistol against his temple, although I heard his teeth chatter.

“You miserable dog!” I exclaimed. “Do you think I have forgotten who lay outside the czarevna’s door? Give me the packet that the Boyar Ramodanofsky gave you, or I will send

you into eternity by the shortest road you can travel!"

He was terribly frightened; having no idea how I came by my accurate information, he evidently imagined that I was acquainted with the black arts. He made no further effort to resist me, but after a little search in his pockets, produced the packet and handed it to me. I released his throat to take it, but kept my pistol at his head until I could examine the seals, and was satisfied that it was the identical packet, and strange to relate, not a seal was broken.

"Knave," I said, "where were you taking this?"

A gleam of malicious satisfaction shone in Homyak's eyes, and yet I was satisfied that he told the truth when he replied, only enjoying the thought of my probable discomfiture when I heard who was arrayed against me.

"I was to take it to the patriarch," he said.

I started. The patriarch! Yes, it might be so, for he was a member of the Sabelief family, and a strong adherent of the Naryshkins; but what a complication! Sophia's secret intrigues to be laid bare before Joachim.

I released the dwarf with a hearty kick. "Go," I exclaimed; "and if I ever find you

meddling with my affairs again, I will cut off your head just behind your ears!"

Homyak did not wait for further admonition, but scurried away like a rabbit, only too thankful to get my fingers off his throat.

CHAPTER XIII.

PRINCE BASIL GALITSYN.

ALTHOUGH the packet was again safe in my possession, I was in some perplexity. The czarevna's directions were emphatic. I was to have delivered it into Prince Galitsyn's hands on the previous evening, and he was then temporarily at the house of the Boyar Urusof. Where the prince was now, and what the czarevna's present wishes in regard to the ill-fated packet, I was at loss to conjecture. Yet it did not occur to me to go back to the Kremlin, and restore her missive with only the plain story of my defeat. While I was casting about in my mind for a ready solution of my difficult problem, I heard the sound of a horse's hoofs, and a rider entered the farther end of the lane; as he approached, I recognized Pierrot. He uttered an exclamation, and slipping from the saddle, stood before me, as stoical as ever, save for a gleam of relief in his eyes. I was

more glad to see the knave than I let him know.

"How came you to seek me here?" I exclaimed, feigning ignorance of his search for me.

"I went back to the doctor's," he replied calmly, "and he told me that you had gone in this direction. You had better take my horse, M. le Vicomte," he added, "and I will return on foot."

"Have you heard anything at the Kremlin to-day?" I asked, after a moment's thought.

"Only of the excitement over the granting of the petitions of the Streltsi," he replied.

"Is Prince Basil Galitsyn there?" I asked, hoping he might have some information.

"No, monsieur," he said; "the prince has not gone to the Kremlin, but has just arrived at his own palace, for I passed there but three quarters of an hour since, and he had just come."

My mind was made up at once.

"I will take your horse, Pierrot," I said; "and you can return and prepare my dinner, for I shall be hungry. Stay," I added, as he turned to go, "tell Dr. von Gaden that I go to Prince Basil Galitsyn's house and from there I shall return to my quarters."

I took this precaution, remembering my experience with the czarevna's papers, and fearing that they might bring me ill luck again. Then I turned my horse's head in the direction of the prince's palace, and made what speed I could, traversing deserted streets again, for all the city was feasting on the hideous spectacle in the quarters of the Streltsi.

My acquaintance with Galitsyn was slight; but I had early recognized his ability, and since Von Gaden's eulogium, had taken a greater interest in him. That his star would rise in case of Sophia's success, I did not doubt, and I felt some curiosity about the probable result of such an event.

Galitsyn was at home, and I was granted immediate admittance. The prince was rich, and his house was furnished with Oriental magnificence; while I stood waiting in one of the anterooms, I had leisure to examine my surroundings, and notice the splendid hangings and luxurious furniture. I had always observed that he was more European in his habits and manners than the rest of the nobles about the court, and I saw here, in his house, the conjunction of Western civilization and Eastern splendor. The doors were open, and where I stood, I could look through a suite of apart-

ments glittering with silver and gold, hung with the richest silks, and ornamented with marble statuary; it was a home worthy a *grand seigneur*. I suspected that he was a man of unlimited ambition, and I could but admire the shrewdness which had enabled him to gain an ascendancy over the mind of the most brilliant member of the imperial family, for I never for a moment dreamed that Galitsyn reciprocated Sophia's affection; but for political reasons, he probably feigned a devotion which he did not feel; such is the misfortune of princesses. Looking back now upon that day, I see how little any of us reckoned on the future of the boy czar,—Peter Alexeivitch, whose hold upon the scepter seemed so slight, yet whose iron hand would one day mold and weld the disintegrated empire into a great state, and sway the destiny of Russia. I scarcely heeded then the shrewd Von Gaden's estimate of the young Tartar; the Jew was the only one who recognized the star that was rising out of that sea of intrigue and misrule.

I waited, possibly, half an hour, before one of the prince's gentlemen came to conduct me into his presence, for Galitsyn hedged himself in with no little ceremony. I followed the usher into a long and splendid *salon*, hung with

the richest tapestry; at the farther end was a writing-table, at which sat Prince Galitsyn, conversing earnestly with a man who wore the uniform of the Streltsi; as I approached I recognized with astonishment my acquaintance, Peter Lykof. A pile of papers lay on the table before Galitsyn, who was so intent upon them that he did not notice the usher who preceded me to announce my entrance. Lykof looking around greeted me with an easy assurance of manner that I had always observed about him; and Galitsyn, looking up at this moment, thrust his papers aside, and saluted me with courtesy.

The prince was an extremely handsome man, and had a grace of manner which made him the most successful of the Russian diplomats, and withal, he had the gallant and straightforward bearing of the soldier that he really was. I signified at once that my business was for his private ear, and Lykof, taking the hint, prepared to withdraw. To my surprise, Galitsyn held out his hand to him warmly, as if bidding adieu to an equal.

"I have to thank you, prince," Lykof said easily, "for your patient hearing of my complaint. I have waited long, but at last I may hope for justice."

"It cannot fail you in so righteous a cause,"

replied the prince at once; "the czarevna probably knows much of the case already, and you may always look for justice at her hands."

I made a mental note of this, and hoped that the czarevna's forbearance was equal to her justice; but something in her small eyes had warned me that her ideas on this point might be a little crude and simple. However, Lykof did not seem troubled with my apprehensions, probably having an easier conscience, and he parted from Galitsyn with the utmost cordiality, saluting me as he passed with a dignity worthy a higher rank.

When I was alone with the prince, I immediately presented my packet, briefly stating my unfortunate experience and the difficulty I had encountered in fulfilling the czarevna's mission. Galitsyn listened attentively, meanwhile turning the packet over and over in his hands, his keen glance shifting from it to my face and back again. When I had concluded, he broke the seals, glanced hastily at the contents, and then, laying it on the table before him, regarded me with an expression which I could not fathom.

"M. le Vicomte," he said slowly, "you have done well. Her Imperial Highness will not forget so distinguished a service. If this packet had reached the hands of an enemy," —

he paused as if to give weight to his words, — “I cannot measure the results. It would be unworthy of me to dissemble with you, M. de Brousson; it would have ruined the Miloslavskys.”

I had divined the importance of my errand, and was amused at the prince’s candor in comparison with Sophia’s caution. He made me repeat to him again the history of my adventure. I had told him frankly every particular, only omitting all mention of Zénaïde, and making Mademoiselle Eudoxie my sole deliverer. He seemed especially angered against Ramodanofsky, not having apparently suspected him of being so deeply committed to the scheme to defeat Sophia’s intrigues.

“It is strange,” he said thoughtfully, “how one thing leads to another. This boyar has an unsavory reputation, it appears.”

It flashed into my mind to tell him Von Gaden’s story; but remembering that the latter’s interests were all with the Naryshkins, I forbore. Instead of speaking of the Ramodanofskys, I expressed my satisfaction at having been able to fulfill my mission at all, and my fears that it was too late to be a successful execution of my trust. Galitsyn’s reply reassured me on one point at least.

"In one respect it is too late," he said, "in that, the Naryshkins overreached themselves. If anything could have prevented this scourging to-day — Ah, well, what odds! But it is just in time, since you saved it from evil hands."

I was not a little shocked at the thought of the horrid consequences that were perhaps involved in the delay of that little packet; Galitsyn, however, apparently dismissed it from his thoughts with perfect ease.

"You have heard the news, M. le Vicomte?" he said lightly; "the ex-Chancellor Matveief has returned."

I was startled at his careless announcement of this arrival, as I knew that the czarina's former guardian was a power even with the Streltsi, and fancied that Galitsyn must feel firm ground under his own feet, or he would not have spoken of it so lightly.

"I knew that the ex-chancellor was at his country-place," I said, as easily as I could, for I had no desire to betray my surprise, "but I had not heard of his arrival in this city."

"Your head was probably tied up in one of Ramodanofsky's rugs at the time," the prince replied with a smile; "but it is a fact that Matveief is here, to assume, I suppose, the reins of government."

I looked at him inquiringly, but could not read his inscrutable and smiling face, therefore I fell back on a safe reply.

"All this is news to me, your excellency," I said. "I was probably, as you say, muffled in one of Ramodanofsky's rugs."

"Well, as long as you escape his steward as happily as our friend did, all will be well," Galitsyn replied serenely; and I saw at once that Lykof had given him a full account of his treatment at the hands of Polotsky.

"I am at a loss," I remarked, "to understand the attack upon Peter Lykof."

The prince laughed. "There are many problems in this world, M. le Vicomte," he said; "but you will find Peter Lykof a very worthy man."

I determined to throw out a hint that I suspected that Lykof was concealing his true identity.

"The man interests me chiefly," I said, "because he seems to be of more importance than he claims."

Galitsyn looked at me thoughtfully, as if making up his mind whether he could fully trust me, and after a moment, determining upon reserve.

"You have approached the truth, M. de

Brousson," he said calmly; "but it is not worth while to fathom it as yet. Lykof is a man who can keep a secret so well that I marvel that you have formed so accurate a conclusion."

"Perhaps he has been more careless with me than usual," I replied, satisfied that there was a good deal behind Galitsyn's reserve, and in spite of myself feeling a keen interest.

"Like the Czarevna Sophia, he has probably recognized your honor, M. le Vicomte," replied the prince, graciously, fencing as easily as usual.

I had told him of Homyak's villainy, and now, before taking my leave, recalled it to his mind.

"The rogue deserves punishment richly," I said angrily, recalling my sensations of suffocation.

"Yes, such vermin are best exterminated," Galitsyn replied; "but he will serve a purpose yet, perhaps. It is always my policy to let such knaves run, not only their own heads, but a few others into the noose before strangling them."

CHAPTER XIV.

MADEMOISELLE EUDOXIE'S WINDOW.

AFTER leaving Galitsyn's palace, I returned at once to my own quarters, and was glad to find that Pierrot had not neglected my instructions, and had a comfortable meal spread. I had been through a rough experience, and was well pleased to rest a little, with a feeling of satisfaction at the safe execution of my mission. I was well rid of the packet, and hoped too to be rid of the consequences. I saw that Pierrot was far less sanguine than I, for he moved about the table as if waiting on a corpse, his lugubrious countenance both amusing and annoying me. However, the evening passed without any event, and I went early to rest, feeling the effect of the rough handling of the previous night, for I was not a little sore and stiff.

The seven days which ensued were disgusting to every decent man. The *pravezh* continued, and officer after officer was publicly

scoured before being permitted to retire in disgrace to his country-place. It was the revolting spectacle of a weak and tottering government unable to control its own soldiers, and swayed too by every fiendish impulse of the mob. How long this state of things could continue seemed an open question, and among the more conservative there was fear that Sophia would never be able to handle the spirit of evil that her intrigues had helped to set free, for it was no secret that the czarevna was working on the feelings of the ignorant soldiers, and upon the populace.

On every hand there were rumors that Sophia feared the treachery of the Naryshkins, and believed that Peter's uncle, Ivan Naryshkin, was himself aiming at the throne. But Von Gaden, in his private talks with me, scoffed at the idea; he thought the czarevna far too shrewd to dream of such absurdities, and that she was merely circulating these *canards* for the purpose of inflaming the ignorant and seditious. I was myself confronted with a new situation, for since the affair of the packet, I had noticed a decided change at the palace, and the Czarina Natalia, on one occasion, treated me with marked coldness. Therefore, as my lot seemed cast with the Miloslavskys, I could no longer

pose as an indifferent spectator, but watched the moves at court with the interest of one of the players at dice; and in those few days before the 25th of May, 1682, it was a desperate game, desperately played. Preparations were in progress for the coronation of Peter Alexeivitch, and the whole strength of the aristocratic party was rallying to his support; some of the most honorable names in Russia were reckoned among his immediate adherents; yet there was no master hand to grip the helm of state, and arrayed against them was a clever woman, seconded by Basil Galitsyn and Ivan Miloslavsky, a strong trio, two of them destined to rule Russia for seven years.

But in the midst of this public excitement, came a call upon me that turned my mind from such intrigues and concentrated it upon an effort to secure my own happiness. Ever since my first agreement with Mademoiselle Eudoxie, I had persistently watched Ramodanofsky's residence, that no ill might come to Zénaïde without a warning to me. I had been at the Kremlin all day, and it was in the dusk of evening that I made my pilgrimage past the gloomy house, and as I approached, it struck me as more than usually forbidding in its aspect; either it was too early for lights, or

they were not near the windows, and the effect was somber in the extreme. The gates of the courtyard were closed, and there was no sign of life. I passed around the front of the house and down the lane which had been the scene of Michael's attack upon me. This lane continued around the back of the house, which was flanked by the other wing, where Mademoiselle Eudoxie's room commanded a part of the lane from one small window; and it was here that she had agreed to place a signal in the hour of need. I had made the pilgrimage many afternoons without result, but as soon as I turned the corner of the wall that evening, I saw a white handkerchief fluttering on the window sill. Mademoiselle Eudoxie's signal! For a moment I was taken by surprise, as we always are when we discover anything that we have looked for assiduously but without success day after day; so it was that I was not only astonished but alarmed at the sight of the signal, and was not slow to conjecture the danger which threatened Zénaïde. Now, in the hour of the coronation of the young czar and the return of Matveief, the Naryshkins were endeavoring to strengthen their position among the boyars, and this alliance would be pushed forward by Ramodanofsky, knowing as he did that after his

action in regard to Sophia's packet, he could hope for nothing from the Miloslavskys; moreover, there was, I knew, an undercurrent in this affair too deep even for my plummet line.

I walked down the lane and returned, observing the window in hopes of discovering mademoiselle on the watch for me; but all was quiet. Meanwhile, I had been reflecting upon the best course to pursue. It would be practically impossible for me to see mademoiselle until after dark, for I could not now approach the house without being seen, and there, too, was the difficulty of the closed gates. In the short twilight which ensued, I had time to collect my thoughts, and be in a measure prepared for the emergency. I reflected that, single handed, I could do little in case there was need for immediate action, and so, reluctant as I was to lose sight of the house, I returned to my own quarters and ordered Pierrot to bring a carriage, and wait at the end of the lane in case I should require either the vehicle or his services. I saw that he had no stomach for the errand, remembering too vividly his experience of the previous week; but he did not venture to offer any remonstrance, and in less than a quarter of an hour after my return to my post, he arrived at the entrance to the lane with the carriage.

The driver was directed to wait a signal where he was; but I stationed Pierrot where he could watch the gates, which had been opened a few moments before to admit a guest. There were lights now in the front of the house, and choosing my opportunity, I slipped into the courtyard unobserved and passed around towards the wing. Here I was confronted with a darkness that alarmed me; only one light showed, and that was in the third window from the main building, where I had first seen Zénaïde. I went directly to the postern and tried it; but it was locked, and I was not a little nonplussed. I dared not knock, for I could not be sure what danger threatened the women, and who would answer my summons. Stepping back from the door, I looked up again at the dark and quiet house, and saw the light shining in the window above my head. Listening intently, I satisfied myself that all the noise in the house came from the other side of the main building; then, I whistled softly two bars from a love-song that I remembered having heard Mademoiselle Eudoxie sing in the old days at the Tour de Brousson. For a moment there was no reply, and I began to despair of attracting their notice without alarming the household; then I saw a slender figure outlined against the light within. I

stepped into the middle of the court and waved my hand over my head. Zénaïde either recognized me or divined who it was, and called Mademoiselle Eudoxie, for I saw the unmistakable outline of the old maid's gaunt figure behind her. I whistled again, very low, another bar from the same song, and was rewarded by seeing mademoiselle leave the window quickly, to go, as I knew, to the postern. She reached it almost as quickly as I did, and admitted me in silence, after first assuring herself that there had been no mistake. She carried a light in her hand, and fastening the door behind me, put her finger on her lip, and then signed to me to follow her. Stepping very cautiously, she preceded me up the stairs into the room where I had first surprised them. Zénaïde was still standing by the window, and at my entrance, took a few steps forward, and greeted me with an air of some reserve. I saw that she was very pale, and her eyes were strangely brilliant. Mademoiselle Eudoxie closed the door, and bolting it with the manner of a conspirator, set her light down beside the one on the table. Zénaïde made a movement as if to leave the room; but mademoiselle looked at her so reproachfully that she paused and stood irresolute. I broke the ice at once.

"I saw the signal, mademoiselle," I said, "and responded immediately. You are in trouble?"

"The greatest!" ejaculated mademoiselle, clasping her hands and looking at Zénaïde. "The worst has happened!"

"M. de Brousson does not understand you, mademoiselle," Zénaïde said gently; and then she turned to me, the color rising on her cheeks until she was no longer pale but sweetly confused. "The worst, M. le Vicomte, means simply that my uncle is determined to compel me to marry Viatscheslav Naryshkin to-morrow morning."

"And shé says that she will kill herself rather than marry a man whom she does not love!" put in mademoiselle, tearfully.

My eyes sought Zénaïde's, and hers fell, the color sweeping up to her fair hair. In a moment I felt that the room was transformed, and no longer considered either the difficulty or the peril of the situation; I was moved out of myself. We were both so silent that mademoiselle stood looking from one to the other, with a growing terror on her thin features; and it seemed to me that those ecstatic little curls of hers danced in sympathy with her affrighted heart-beats.

"What can we do?" she exclaimed tremulously.

"If Mademoiselle Ramodanofsky is willing to be guided by my counsel, I think I can suggest a way to evade this trouble," I said, with a little hesitation, trying quickly to decide on the wiser of two courses.

Zénaïde, having recovered her composure, turned to me with something of her natural manner.

"I am in too great straits to refuse any one's advice, monsieur," she said gently; "my uncle is an inflexible man, and I can expect no mercy at his hands — and surely none from Naryshkin," she added with a gesture of contempt.

"Tell us what to do!" cried mademoiselle, hysterically, before I could reply; the poor soul was beside herself with terror.

"There are two courses open to you, Mademoiselle Ramodanofsky," I said at once; "and in both cases you must accept my escort from this house to-night."

I saw Zénaïde's start and her questioning glance at mademoiselle, who was incapable of advising or guiding any one then, and who looked to me with implicit confidence.

"I have reason to think, mademoiselle," I continued, addressing Zénaïde, "that the

Czarevna Sophia could, and would, protect you against your uncle's violence. There is also another way of securing your liberty, but that would take a longer time to accomplish" — I was thinking of a full exposure of Vladimir's villainy. "One course would be to permit me to conduct you and Mademoiselle Eudoxie directly to the Kremlin, and to rely on the czarevna's ability to defend you. The other course, which seems easier and safer as a first move, is to go secretly to Dr. von Gaden's house. His wife will receive you, and I am sure that the doctor can and will conceal your presence there for a few days, until we find means to evade your uncle's determination."

"To what end, M. le Vicomte?" asked Zénaïde, quietly, a strangely resolute expression about her mouth.

I was embarrassed; it was no part of my intention to reveal my scheme for Ramodanof-sky's defeat, but I recognized the significance of her question; she had seen at a glance that all that was to be gained was a possible delay. It was not usual in Russia to oppose the guardian's wishes in regard to the marriage of his charge, and I knew that she considered that the situation was desperate.

"Mademoiselle," I said firmly, meeting her

eyes with resolution, "there is a matter of which I cannot speak, but which bears immediately upon the case, and leads me to believe that your uncle dare not do violence to your inclinations in the face of the czarevna's opposition, and he has deeply offended Sophia by his connection with this business of the packet. Trust me, mademoiselle, to unravel the tangled skein. At least, any delay would be better than marriage to-morrow with Viatscheslav!"

She threw back her head with a motion of proud disdain.

"M. de Brousson," she said slowly, "I will never marry that man!"

Mademoiselle Eudoxie gave way to her grief and sobbed behind her handkerchief.

"She will kill herself!" she moaned; "that is the way she goes on!"

"Mademoiselle," I said quietly, looking at Zénaïde, "a carriage is waiting in the lane; we have not much time to lose. I pray you get your cloak, and Mademoiselle Eudoxie will accompany us to Dr. von Gaden's house."

"Do come, dear Zénaïde," pleaded her companion, looking up over the top of her handkerchief, her eyes red and swollen.

"I would go gladly enough, Mademoiselle Eudoxie," Zénaïde replied frankly, "if I knew

that I should gain my liberty at last, and if I did not fear being a most unwelcome and burdensome guest in the good doctor's house."

"In that matter I can relieve your mind, mademoiselle," I exclaimed hastily. "Dr. von Gaden has the friendliest regard for you, and I have reason to know that he will consider it a privilege to shelter you in this hour of need."

Zénaïde looked at me searchingly. "You are very reassuring, M. de Brousson," she said quietly, "and I see that there is some reason behind all this that causes your confidence; but you must forgive my hesitation. I am indeed in sore straits; but I know my uncle to be a relentless man, and I would not willingly bring down his wrath upon this Jewish physician, from whom I have received nothing but good offices. The Czar Peter will soon be crowned, and the Naryshkins once in power, it will be ruin to have tried to help me against one of that family."

"Mademoiselle," I said gently, "I have the greatest respect for your scruples; but, believe me, they are without serious foundation. If the Naryshkins could hold the balance of power, there would have been no *pravezh*. And, in any case, will you risk nothing for your liberty?"

She looked up, and I saw the tears shining in her blue eyes.

"M. le Vicomte," she exclaimed passionately, "I would risk life itself, but — I do not wish to peril yours!"

I took her hand and pressed it to my lips. Mademoiselle Eudoxie was crying with much noise by the table.

"Mademoiselle Ramodanofsky," I said firmly, "I would not leave you in this extremity; and if I remain here —" I looked at her and paused.

"Mademoiselle," Zénaïde said, with a break in her voice, "are our cloaks here? We must go!"

Mademoiselle Eudoxie ceased sobbing and immediately produced the cloaks. I helped her to muffle Zénaïde and herself, and then, without any light, we went out, and fastening the door of the room on the outside, took the key with us, to delay as long as possible the discovery of their flight; then went groping our way down the narrow steps, starting at every creak of the stairs, like the conspirators that we were.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FLIGHT.

WHILE the women were creeping down ahead of me, I reflected upon the risks of our situation, and speculated a little upon the chances of Ramodanofsky's having neglected to set a watch upon his niece. All these thoughts crowded into my mind, as thoughts always do, in such a crisis. We had the long court to cross before we could be out of range of a dozen windows. Mademoiselle Eudoxie seemed nerved by the excitement of the moment, and preceded us with a firm step, Zénaïde's slender cloaked figure following her, and I so close behind that her garments brushed against me as we went. We got down the stairs safe, and across the anterooms, and mademoiselle had unfastened the postern, before a noise to the left startled us and hastened her movements. She and Zénaïde were passing out when a door opposite was thrown open and a man stood on the threshold, holding a light in

his hand. In the first moment, the sudden illumination in the dark hall dazzling our eyes, I do not think that he saw me any more distinctly than I saw him. I was carrying my sheathed sword in my hand, and the inspiration coming to me with the peril, I struck the light from his hand, and it sputtered and went out on the floor; but in the instant before extinction it flared up, and I recognized the steward Polotsky, and feared that he recognized me. The next moment I was outside, and had closed the door behind me. Mademoiselle Eudoxie, with a quickness of thought that I had not given her credit for, had removed the key from the inside out, and turned it now before joining our hurried flight across the court. I was regretting all the while that I had not struck Polotsky down, but my hand had been stayed by fear of an outcry, which would have roused the house.

Half way across the court, Mademoiselle Eudoxie halted with a little suppressed cry, pointing to a man in front of us. It was too late to retreat now, and Zénaïde evidently understood this as well as I did, for she advanced calmly towards him, taking the lead, as became her position in the house. He stood aside for her, and to my relief, I recognized Pierrot. Seeing me, he fell into line, and followed us,

greatly to mademoiselle's discomfiture; but there was no time for explanation, and we passed out of the courtyard without further incident. Pierrot, running ahead, summoned the carriage with two low whistles, and we helped mademoiselle and Zénaïde to get in, I following them, while Pierrot rode with the coachman. Once fairly off, I drew a sigh of relief. There were, at least, no signs of pursuit or indeed of any disturbance, the house maintaining a quiet that made me marvel at Polotsky's failure to give the alarm, and I began to wonder a little if he was not the best person to have discovered us; but mademoiselle quickly dispelled this illusion when I told her who had opened the door upon us.

"The saints defend us!" she exclaimed. "No one could be worse except the boyar himself. Polotsky is a devil!"

I was heartily of her opinion, but had the encouragement of feeling that we had so far evaded pursuit.

Zénaïde said nothing; I could discern the outline of her figure opposite me, and she seemed to have sunk back into her corner with an entire surrender of purpose, letting events shape themselves. We were driving fast, and the distance was not great.

"I wish you had killed him!" mademoiselle remarked, becoming suddenly bloodthirsty, which was amusing; for immediately a vision of her mild, frightened face arose.

"I would have killed him cheerfully," I replied, "if I had not feared that he would raise an outcry, and so make your escape impossible."

"He would have done so; he is a great coward," said Zénaïde, quietly. "Besides," she added to mademoiselle, "you would not have M. le Vicomte's sword stained with the blood of such a toad."

"Dead men tell no tales," mademoiselle muttered to herself, "and I have always dreaded that man; he has an eye like a cat's."

"He is undoubtedly an accomplished villain, for my uncle reposes great confidence in him," remarked Zénaïde, with a bitter little laugh.

"It is not worth while considering it now," I said, to reassure them; "we undoubtedly evaded his vigilance by locking the door upon him. I do not believe that he reached the other part of the house before we were safely out of the court, and he is not likely to fathom our designs."

"One cannot tell," murmured mademoiselle. "I sometimes think that he and Ramodanofsky

— I beg your pardon, Zénaïde — are allied with Satan, it seems so difficult to defeat them."

A hundred yards from Von Gaden's house the carriage stopped, and Pierrot came to the door.

"What is the matter?" I asked sharply.

"A carriage is easily tracked, M. le Vicomte," he said hesitatingly, "and I thought perhaps, as a precaution, you had better go the rest of the way on foot."

He spoke in French, evidently supposing that both women were Russians and would not understand him, for I saw his start of surprise when Mademoiselle Eudoxie exclaimed, in her native tongue, —

"He is right, Monsieur Philippe; we had better get out here, for if Polotsky try to track us, he will follow the carriage."

I saw the wisdom of the suggestion, and getting out, helped them to alight. Pierrot directed the coachman to return by a circuitous route to my quarters, while we four proceeded on foot to Von Gaden's house. I was half inclined to doubt the necessity for the precaution when I looked back and saw only deserted streets. I walked in front with Zénaïde, and Pierrot escorted mademoiselle, who, recognizing him as a fellow-countryman, chatted to him

as they went; anything French was welcome to her. For a little way Zénaïde and I were silent, but as the doctor's house was near at hand, she spoke.

"M. de Brousson," she said in a low voice, in which there was a slight tremor, "I have no words in which to thank you. My gratitude is equal to the horror from which I am fleeing. Alone, mademoiselle and I could have accomplished nothing; we did not even know what to do. To you, then, monsieur, I owe a liberty which is more precious than my life."

I was deeply moved, and words rushed to my lips which I dared not utter at that time, and in her hour of peril.

"Mademoiselle," I said, as quietly as I could, "it is my happiness to have served you, and my hope to serve you yet more faithfully. I will spare nothing to deliver you from your uncle, and to obtain your entire freedom from restraint."

"It is a terrible thing, M. de Brousson," Zénaïde said thoughtfully, "to be persecuted by one of your own family; but my uncle has never had any sympathy for me. I am merely a card in his hands, to be played when the stakes are certain; he has never considered

me as a human being. He is cruel, and I dread the consequences to you of these kind offices."

"Fear nothing, mademoiselle," I responded cheerfully. "I know also something of your uncle, and fear him not at all."

"You are brave, monsieur," she replied with a soft little laugh. "As a rule my uncle is a terror to friends and foes. Alas! I believe no one is his friend except through fear or favor; that is the common fate of such men as he!"

"That is true, mademoiselle," I replied thoughtfully; "but it is also true that to a man of such inflexible will, the support of friendly sympathy is superfluous. I can fancy him treating it with scorn. He would rejoice in ruling by the force of his own determination, and crushing out all resistance."

"Yes," she said quietly; "he would crush out life itself if the opposition to his will were obstinate. I believe that he has learned to hate me since he has found that I will not yield to his authority the unquestioning obedience of a child, and yet he has never tried to win me to submission by any kindness or persuasion. He is a man of iron."

I thought of her persecuted mother and her murdered father, and had no words with which

to answer her. How little she measured the villainy of this stern man! she was like a child trying to read the soul of a rogue.

We had reached Von Gaden's house, and the doctor himself opened the door in response to my summons. He looked not a little surprised at the sight of the two women with me, but admitted us with his usual gentle courtesy. We entered, leaving Pierrot on the doorstep to watch for and warn us of possible pursuit. Mademoiselle and he remembered each other, for he had been at the château while she was there, and it was amusing to see the mutual joy at the discovery of some one who belonged to that quiet and trustworthy past, for they both had the same horror of their present environment; and she seemed to feel reassured because this old retainer watched at the door. The doctor ushered her and Zénaïde into a private room, and then I asked to speak to him alone, feeling that I could explain matters more clearly out of the hearing of the two most concerned. I was for going straight into the doctor's study, but to my surprise, found that already occupied. A man was sitting by the table and rose at the sight of me; it was Peter Lykof, but the doctor drew me into another room, and closing the door with his back, stood

regarding me with an expression of inquiry in his eyes. Now that I had brought Zénaïde to his house, I realized that I was demanding a good deal of his kindness, and exposing him to no contemptible danger. I was therefore not a little disturbed at the unusual *brusquerie* of his demeanor. He saw my momentary embarrassment, and his manner relaxed.

"Well, M. le Vicomte," he said quietly, "I see that your errand is unusual, but we gain nothing by delay. To what am I indebted for the honor of this visit from the unknown ladies yonder?"

I looked up in surprise; it had not occurred to me that he had failed to recognize them under their mufflings.

"It is Mademoiselle Ramodanofsky and her *demoiselle de compagnie*," I said at once, "come to you in an hour of great distress, and at my recommendation."

Von Gaden started at the mention of her name, and was looking at me curiously.

"This is strange," he remarked thoughtfully; "the coincidences of this life are marvelous!"

"I ventured to appeal to you to help her," I went on, "because you, before any one, knew of the villainy of her uncle. He is now determined to force this young girl to marry that

rogue, Viatscheslav Naryshkin, to-morrow morning, and she has declared that she will sooner die. In this extremity, I could think of but two avenues of escape for her: one was a direct appeal to the Czarevna Sophia; the other, temporary concealment in your house, until influence can be brought to bear upon Ramodanofsky, to compel him to surrender his purpose. I have reason to believe that the czarevna will aid her cheerfully."

Von Gaden took a short turn across the room, evidently much excited.

"May I ask you a question that must seem impertinent, M. de Brousson?" he said at last. "How did you penetrate the fortress of a Russian house and learn these secrets, when Ramodanofsky is, I know, no friend of yours?"

My color rose, but I understood the Jew's amazement.

"I owe my success to my own temerity," I replied; "the confidence is from my sister's old governess, Mademoiselle Eudoxie. But if they cannot safely stay here under your wife's protection, you must tell me at once, so that we can go straight to the Kremlin."

"Are you mad, Brousson?" exclaimed Von Gaden, hastily. "Go to the Kremlin in the midst of such excitement! Sophia is not strong

enough to-day to protect the palace from the violence of the mob that she has tried to excite to mutiny ever since the Czar Feodor's funeral. Zénaïde Feodorovna is welcome to the shelter of my roof as long as I have one. It would be madness to go out again to-night. Vladimir Ramodanofsky will search well for his victim, and he will not let her escape so easily again. These are uncertain times, M. le Vicomte. To-day it looks as if the scale were turning in the favor of the Naryshkins. Matveief is holding a reception at his house, and all the courtiers are carrying presents to him; who can tell whether or not that astute old chancellor may not stem the tide of popular displeasure and establish his former ward's son firmly upon the throne? In which case," added Von Gaden, snapping his fingers, "I would not give that for Sophia's influence at court."

I would not be discouraged. "I differ with you," I said at once; "I do not believe that forty Matveiefs could turn the tide at this late hour. The thunder of sedition is already rumbling over yonder in the quarters of the Streltsi, and I have seen Basil Galitsyn's confidence; he is too shrewd a man to plant his feet on sand."

Von Gaden shook his head. However, his

interests were with the Naryshkins, and it was natural for him to overestimate their strength. At least I was assured of Zénaïde's immediate safety; and after a little consultation, Von Gaden went to his wife, and she received mademoiselle and Zénaïde, carrying them away to her portion of the house. It was then that Dr. von Gaden puzzled me by advising me to take no action in the matter for the present.

"Let affairs drift with the tide for a day or so," he said. "There is scarcely a chance of their presence here being discovered; meanwhile, the crisis is approaching, and we shall know which side will hold the balance of power. The old boyar has chosen his time cleverly, to force Zénaïde's marriage just when interference from the Kremlin was unlikely; but he counted without his host," he added with a peculiar smile, "and she has shown her father's spirit in her resistance. I always felt that there was good mettle in her, and that she would fight when the hour came."

I rose to go. "I will leave Pierrot here," I said, "as an additional safeguard in case of need."

"It is unnecessary," the doctor replied; "I have a sufficient number of servants to watch over the household, and the presence of your

man will only attract notice, and mayhap arouse suspicion. Leave Mademoiselle Zénaïde to me, and only hold yourself in readiness for any call."

I was reluctant enough to do this, and yet recognized the wisdom of his advice, and could not ask permission to stay on guard myself, although I longed to do so, and fancied that Von Gaden had already divined my secret. Whether that was the case or not, he was evidently anxious to get me out of the house, and I was compelled to submit to fate, and withdraw with what grace I could command.

As I went out, I saw Lykof still sitting in the doctor's study, and wondered a little at his errand. On the doorstep I found Pierrot, faithful to his duty. He reported that all was quiet, and he had seen nothing to arouse any suspicion that we had been traced to Von Gaden's house; so I went to my quarters with a comparatively quiet mind.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE AUDIENCE-CHAMBER.

THE following day I went to the Kremlin, mainly for the purpose of learning, if possible, the result of Zénaïde's flight, for I was sure that the disappointment of Viatscheslav Naryshkin would soon be known.

I reached the palace at the hour when the Czarina Natalia received various petitions, and the anterooms of the audience-chamber were crowded with courtiers and public personages. The etiquette of the Russian court was rigid, and on such occasions no one could sit in the presence of the sovereign; and it was not unusual to see boyars and officials go out into the courtyard to sit down and rest.

As I entered the anteroom, Prince Basil Galitsyn was coming out, and he passed me with a smile.

"Good-morning to you, squire of dames," he said lightly, waving his hand to me as he passed on.

I was puzzled, not only by the remark, but by the stir that my entrance made. I saw Homyak dodging away amidst the crowd, and there was a little hush in the murmur of talk, and more than one stranger craned his neck to gaze at me over another's shoulder. Without heeding this unusual demonstration, I crossed the room to the reception hall, where two *rhinds*, or guards of honor, in white satin and silver uniform, stood on either side the door, and one of the chamberlains ushered in the visitors.

The Czarina Natalia was seated on a throne-like chair at the end of the apartment, and the ex-Chancellor Matveief stood at her right hand. Her robe of silver brocade, covered with white lace and trimmed with sables, made her a splendid figure. She was still a young woman, and as I looked at her that morning, I was more than usually impressed with the contrast between the tall and graceful form of Alexis' widow and her short and ill-proportioned step-daughter Sophia. Natalia was handsome; her fine features and black hair were striking, and her large dark eyes had a fire and beauty which suggested the attraction that had won the heart of Alexis the Most Debonair. Only a czar could afford to marry as he pleased; every other

sovereign of Europe had his consort selected for reasons of state, but the Autocrat of Russia could wed his own subject and make her an empress. Matveief's wife was a Scotchwoman, and had introduced the freedom of western manners into the household; and she and her husband's ward, Natalia Naryshkin, served the *vodka* and caviare when Alexis was visiting his chancellor, thus giving the czar an opportunity to observe the young girl. A short time after this interesting social occasion, the daughter of old Kirill Naryshkin became the Czarina and Grand Duchess Natalia Kirilovna of all Great and Little and White Russia. At the death of Alexis, Natalia as the dowager czarina was, by virtue of the old Russian law, the head of the imperial family.

It was the first time that I had ever seen the czarina's former guardian, the man whose influence and diplomacy had firmly established his ward as Alexis' wife in the teeth of as bitter opposition as was ever met by a bride of Russia, and it was a peculiarly terrible ordeal to be selected as the imperial bride. The custom was time-honored and unique. When a czar desired a spouse, the maidens of Moscow and the provinces were assembled, summoned according to certain restrictions in regard to

rank and beauty, and the autocrat made his choice. After the imperial decision, came the hour of tribulation; the fortunate (?) candidate was attacked by the malice and envy of every faction at court, and more than one imperial bride-elect was drugged into the semblance of illness, one having her hair twisted up so tightly by her affectionate ladies-in-waiting that she fainted. The immediate result of such accidents was the charge that the young woman was afflicted with an incurable disorder; and as it was regarded in the light of treason to present such a candidate, the unfortunate and her family were sent to Siberia, if she did not die suddenly, as did the Princess Marie Dolgoruky. So it may be seen that to be an aspirant for the imperial matrimonial diadem was to be also a candidate for exile, imprisonment, painful hair-dressing, and poison.

Artemon Sergheievitch Matveief was now an old man of commanding presence. He wore the rich, flowing robe of a boyar, and his white hair and full beard added a dignity to a countenance at once astute and benevolent. He had tasted the stinging humiliation of political defeat, and eaten the bitter bread of exile in the province of Archangel; he had been pardoned by the Czar Feodor, and was on his way

home at the time of Feodor's untimely death; but it remained for Natalia to summon him, in an hour of great difficulty and peril, once more to grasp the helm of state. Was it too late? Alas! for him that question was to be too certainly answered in a few short days, on that Red Staircase which he had ascended to-day in the joyful emotion of reunion with his kindred, and the exhilaration of a return of political prestige and power, sweeter than ever to a long banished statesman. At this moment, he was conversing earnestly with the patriarch, and a group of nobles stood at a little distance waiting his convenience. The czarina was speaking to her own brother, Ivan Naryshkin.

On the other side of the room, I saw Viatscheslav and Ramodanofsky, and in the group nearest me recognized, to my surprise, one of the opposing faction, Larion Miloslavsky. He greeted me with the same air of raillery affected by Prince Galitsyn, and I observed the smiling glances cast at me by the young noblemen about him.

"Have you heard the rare bit of gossip that is afloat this morning, M. le Vicomte?" he inquired gayly.

I replied that having just reached the Kremlin, I was ignorant of the news. At this, he

glanced archly at his companions, and there was a smile which annoyed me not a little.

"I do not understand the drift of your humor, gentlemen," I said, a trifle sharply.

"Is it possible that you do not observe the black looks of Ramodanofsky and Viatscheslav Naryshkin?" Miloslavsky asked, with more gravity.

In a moment I caught the reason of their amusement, but was at loss to understand their readiness to apply it to me. I feigned astonishment, and looked inquiringly in the direction of Ramodanofsky and his companion, only to encounter a black look from the former.

"What is the story?" I asked carelessly, meeting Miloslavsky's quizzical glance with one of calm interrogation.

"It appears that the old boyar, who is, as you may have divined, of an amiable disposition, intended to marry his beautiful niece to Viatscheslav Naryshkin this morning," replied Miloslavsky. "He had the sanction of the czarina; but it transpires that he forgot to consider the feelings of Zénaïde Feodorovna, and lo and behold, this morning her apartments are vacant, and she and her French governess have flown! The priest and Viatscheslav were ready, but the bride had vanished, and there is

the sound of lamentation in the gentle boyar's palace; it is even rumored that he has murdered a lackey or two and roasted a maid, because of their failure to detect and report the movements of his ward. The bridegroom is, of course, inconsolable; and, a word with you, M. le Vicomte, it will not be wise to irritate his gentle temperament to-day."

This last was addressed to me in an aside. I glanced at Larion keenly, but could not read his meaning in his face; I was sure of only one thing, — that they knew more than they would divulge, and that, in some mysterious way, my connection with the affair had been whispered about. I was not surprised at Miloslavsky's tone in speaking of Ramodanofsky, for I knew that all that faction detested him.

I endeavored to turn the conversation away from myself. "I can scarcely fancy Viatscheslav as a forlorn lover," I said lightly; "I imagine he can easily console himself."

"It is not the loss of his lady-love which troubles him," replied Miloslavsky, "but the mortification of such a defeat, and at the hands of an inexperienced girl."

"Picture to yourself his feelings, M. de Brousson," said one of the other young nobles; "he has fancied himself an irresistible gallant,

and here is a young bride running from him as from the plague. It is the rarest joke upon him, and he takes it ill enough. Look at his scowl; it has been gathering like a thunder-storm all the morning."

Following the young fellow's glance, I beheld Viatscheslav standing in his former position, and lowering at us as if he knew that he was the subject of our discussion. The man's surly face struck me with a new horror, and I understood Zénaïde's desperation.

When I passed on to make my obeisance to the czarina, I noticed at once a change in her manner; it was even more marked than on previous occasions, and I felt not a little chagrin at her decided coldness. Natalia's manner could be haughty in the extreme. She had tasted the vicissitudes of fortune herself, and they had probably left a permanent impression upon her character. She was neither as subtle nor as diplomatic as her great rival, Sophia, and showed her feelings with more openness. She undoubtedly valued the men about her only as she could estimate their devotion to her son, and she resented at once any friendship for the cause of the Miloslavskys. Matveief, on the other hand, was anxious to conciliate; willing, too, to make a favorable impression upon a

foreigner, his courtesy to me being as marked as the czarina's coldness. My chief annoyance, however, was to find myself the center of observation, and there was a continuous murmur of talk, which was suggestive that I was the object of remark. Before finding an opportunity to depart, I came in immediate contact with the group about Ramodanofsky and Viatscheslav, and they watched me in silence as I approached, intending to pass them on my way out. But I was not destined to escape so easily; Viatscheslav, by a sudden movement, placed himself directly in my path. I made an attempt to turn aside to avoid him; but he checked me by a gesture.

"You have doubtless heard the tattle of the court to-day, M. le Vicomte," he said in a loud voice, which drew general attention; "the Boyar Ramodanofsky has suffered an affront; some one has assisted his niece in her flight from his house."

"This is a matter which cannot concern a stranger, monsieur," I replied coldly, although in a fever of anger and embarrassment, for I saw that we were on the edge of a *dénouement*, and dreaded the consequences of a colloquy before such an audience. Ramodanofsky was listening, but took no part in the conversation;

his dark brows bent low over his eyes as he lowered at us.

"A servant of yours, M. de Brousson," Viat-scheslav said, with an emphasis on the word servant, "has been seen lurking in the neighborhood of the house; perhaps you can satisfactorily explain his presence there."

My choler was rising fast. My hand was resting on the hilt of my sword, and I looked Naryshkin straight in the eye; I knew him to be an inveterate coward unless liquor inspired him with temporary bravado.

"Since when has it become necessary for me to account to you for my servants or my conduct, monsieur?" I exclaimed haughtily, and in a clear voice. "You forget that you address a French subject, the Vicomte de Brousson."

One could have heard a pin drop; even the czarina and Matveief were listening to the dispute; but my blood was up, and it was a matter of indifference to me whether I offended against court etiquette or not.

"Since when has it been the right of French subjects to violate Russian laws, M. le Vicomte?" he retorted angrily. "You will find that the King of France cannot save you from being called to account in Moscow."

"This passes my patience, monsieur!" I re-

plied coldly. "If you have any grievance against me, you should prefer it at the proper time."

"I am at your service at any hour, M. de Brousson," he said, misunderstanding me.

Then, remembering how vile the man was, my anger passed the bounds of prudence. I measured him with my eye, from head to foot, with a glance which made the blood burn under his swarthy skin.

"You mistake me," I said with mocking suavity; "no gentleman of France would consent to meet you on the field of honor. The sword of a Brousson would be forever contaminated!"

This goaded him to fury, and before any one could check him, his sword flew from the scabbard, and he made a pass at me, which was thrust aside by the czarina herself. She stood between us with a gesture of indignation which suddenly lent an imperial dignity to her aspect.

"You forget in whose presence you stand," she said haughtily; "if I cannot be an empress even in my own palace, it is time that I laid aside my crown. Viatscheslav, leave the room at once; and you, M. le Vicomte," she said, turning on me coldly, "have you considered

the courtesy due a hostess, if you do not recognize the honor due a queen?"

I made a profound obeisance.

"I crave your majesty's pardon and indulgence," I said; "the quarrel was provoked by the other side, but I recognize my error, and regret it deeply."

She accepted the apology haughtily.

"It is well," she said; "but let it not occur again, or I shall begin to doubt that Natalia is a czarina."

And she turned coldly away, leaving me to make my exit with what grace I could assume, under the curious gaze of fifty pairs of eyes.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SECRET STAIRCASE.

I HAD almost reached the foot of the Red Staircase, when some one caught my cloak; turning, I was confronted by Peter Lykof's servant Michael. The man's face was full of anxiety, and he drew close to me before addressing me in Russian.

"You are watched," he said in a low voice; "your life is in danger. My master bade me warn you."

"Where is your master?" I asked at once, marveling a little at the rapidity with which Lykof had acquired the news.

"He will see you presently," Michael replied, still mysteriously. "He is not far away; but he, too, is threatened with danger."

"I shall be glad to see him," I said slowly, "and I thank you for the warning. I can imagine that it may be a little difficult for me," I added, smiling, for I could not easily forget

Viatscheslav's look of baffled fury, or the lowering eyes of Ramodanofsky.

"Be warned, your excellency," the man protested nervously. "The Boyar Vladimir Ramodanofsky never forgets an injury."

I started. Could nothing be kept secret in Russia? How many were in my confidence? I regarded the fellow with a feeling of anger. It seemed to me that my affairs might as well be placarded on my back. Whether he interpreted my expression or not I could not tell; but he drew back, and saluting me respectfully, departed in the direction of the Cathedral of Basil the Beatified.

I walked on, crossing the Red Place without meeting any one but an equerry of Prince Galitsyn, who passed me with a courteous salutation; and proceeding at a rapid gait, I went out at the Gate of the Redeemer, and made directly for Dr. von Gaden's house. I was extremely anxious and disturbed. In some mysterious way, my connection with Zénaïde's flight was an open secret; the whole court, from the czarina and Prince Galitsyn to the humblest gentleman-in-waiting, were acquainted with the circumstance. I could scarcely hope, therefore, that her retreat would remain undiscovered, in which case Von Gaden's house would

be but an insecure asylum for her. I reflected anxiously upon the situation, and could see only one course open; but nothing could be done without her consent, and I felt that Sophia might not be strong enough to protect Zénaïde at this juncture. If I had dared to ask her to marry me at that time, I should have proposed flight to France, difficult and hazardous as that would have been. I believed that it could be accomplished, but I dared not approach her so abruptly; for although I hoped much, I was not yet assured of her regard, and she was hedged in by the training and usage that made a romantic courtship almost impossible. Beset with these reflections, I made rapid progress, looking neither to the right nor the left until I found myself at Von Gaden's door. As soon as I obtained admittance, I sent a message to Madame von Gaden, requesting to speak with her guest, Mademoiselle Ramodanofsky, or with Mademoiselle Eudoxie. In a few moments the physician's wife came down alone. Before I had time to repeat my request, she addressed me with an unusually perturbed manner.

"I went myself with your message, M. le Vicomte," she said anxiously, "but I cannot obtain admittance. Your friends have bolted the only door that communicates with the hall

from their rooms, and they do not reply to my repeated summons."

Knowing that Mademoiselle Eudoxie was the last person in the world to ignore her hostess, or treat her with courtesy, I took alarm at once.

"Can anything have happened to them?" I exclaimed hastily.

"Impossible!" madame replied. "No one has disturbed us, or even inquired for them, and they were well and composed when their breakfast was served. There are three rooms, and they may have fallen asleep in the one farthest from the hall. In no other way can I explain their failure to respond to my calls."

"If you will permit me, madame," I said at once, "I will go with you to the door. Mayhap I can make more noise, and rouse these fair sleepers."

In my heart, I never thought that they were sleeping, but could see no explanation of their silence. Madame von Gaden assented readily to my proposal, and I followed her up the stairs. Arriving at the second floor, she led me along a short hall to the right, and pausing before a closed door, tapped on it lightly with her finger.

"These are the rooms, M. de Brousson," she said, and I saw the reflection of my own apprehension on her face. She stood aside, and I knocked on the door, receiving no response. Then, thoroughly alarmed, I took the hilt of my sword, and struck the panel with considerable force. The blow echoed through the quiet house; but there was no response from within, not the slightest movement. Madame had grown very pale, and stood with her hand on her heart.

"Is there any other way of approaching these apartments?" I asked abruptly.

She started violently, as if with a sudden recollection.

"The secret staircase!" she exclaimed at once, staring at me in blank amazement.

"*Ma foi!* " I cried, pushed beyond all patience. "Explain yourself, madame. This is a serious matter."

"Alas!" she replied with equal excitement. "Do I not know it? But it is impossible that any one should find the secret staircase from without, and surely they would not go away themselves without informing us."

"Either show me the staircase, madame," I said, "or permit me to force the door."

"Force it by all means, monsieur," she re-

plied hastily; "it is the shortest way. I wish that Dr. von Gaden had not gone out."

I was too thoroughly alarmed to hesitate a moment longer, and forced the lock as quickly as I could with the tools that madame had at hand. When it gave way, we entered the ante-room, and crossing it, pushed on into the bed-rooms beyond. They were silent and deserted; there were signs of recent occupation, but there was no one in either room. Madame ran ahead of me, and passing into the farther apartment, went to a curtained alcove, and pushing aside the hangings, uttered an exclamation. Following her, I saw that she had uncovered a secret door, a panel in the wall, and it was partially thrust aside. Without a word, she ran for a light and preceded me through the narrow aperture, down a crooked flight of stairs, evidently contrived to facilitate the escape of the occupants of these rooms. As we went, she held the light low down, that we might see the stairs, and I was forced to feel my way cautiously, for they were irregular, and extremely steep. Half way down madame stopped and pointed, and seeing an object lying at her feet, I stooped and picked up a veil, which I recognized at once as the one worn by Zénaïde on the previous evening. This in-

creased my alarm, and we moved on more cautiously. At the foot of the stairs was a door which was unlatched, and here madame stood aside, shielding her light from the draught, while I opened the door and found myself in a subterranean vault. A gust of air from the other side guided me to a half-opened trap-door, which I lifted, and looked out into the lane behind Von Gaden's house. We had reached the end of our explorations, and it was not difficult to draw conclusions. I looked out; but there was no sign of any one, and on either side were the gray walls of the house and court. Madame von Gaden stood by the cellar door, shielding her light; neither of us had uttered a word, but each comprehended the other's thought. I felt that madame suspected that her mysterious guests had departed of their own free will, while I knew that it could not be so, unless there had been some deception used. In any case, no time could be lost. I closed the trap, and madame, comprehending my conclusion, turned and led the way up the stairs, this time stopping to search each step with her light, but without result. Zénaïde's veil, which was in my hand, was the only proof that she had descended the secret stairs. At the top I closed the panel, and madame, set-

ting down the light, looked about with a kind of nervous apprehension; it was evident that she was terribly agitated and alarmed. If I had had any just cause to doubt her loyalty or her husband's, it would have been removed by her manifest trepidation. I looked anxiously about the rooms, but there were absolutely no signs of violence; it seemed as if Mademoiselle Eudoxie and Zénaïde might have been quietly sitting there but a moment since.

"Have you heard any sounds to alarm you?" I asked, thoroughly at sea.

She shook her head. "Not a sound," she replied earnestly; "and it seems impossible that any one has discovered that staircase. No one has known of it but the doctor and myself, and the man who built it is dead. He was a faithful German, and returned to his own country and died there more than two years ago."

"Yet it is evident that some one found the stairs," I retorted a trifle sharply, for I was sorely tried.

"Not from without," she protested; "the fastenings were too secure."

I had noticed this, and it had increased my perplexity. I went now to the windows and looked out; two of them were on the main street, two

on the lane, but it was impossible for any one to scale that solid wall and obtain entrance there. I saw that madame's solution was the most feasible, but nevertheless promptly rejected it; it was impossible that these two women should secretly flee from the protection of the good doctor; at such a time, besides, nothing could result from the flight but certain disaster. Zénaïde's quick mind would have rejected such a plan as wholly impracticable, and mademoiselle was far too timid to have either proposed or sanctioned it. I was at my wits' end, and madame was far too obstinate in her opinion to suggest any other solution of the problem, although she assisted me readily enough in making a thorough search of the rooms for any sign or token which might explain the motive or the cause of the strange disappearance. Remembering that Ramodanofsky and Viatscheslav were at the palace when I arrived there, and that I had left them there when I departed, I questioned madame about the hour at which breakfast had been served to her guests, and found that they had eaten it while I was at the Kremlin; therefore their departure had not only been recent, but had not been accomplished by Ramodanofsky or Naryshkin, in person at least. This, while it

was perplexing, was also reassuring. I should have been glad of Von Gaden's presence and counsel; but he had not yet returned, and I could think of no better assistant than Pierrot.

I went to my own quarters in a state of great perturbation; my anxiety was of the liveliest, and in addition, I saw that my position was becoming hourly more difficult. I cared for nothing at this time, however, except for Zénaïde's safety. On my way to my house, I hit upon a plan for obtaining information, and as soon as I reached there, took Pierrot into my confidence, and together we considered the advisability of carrying out my scheme. Pierrot, doubtless suspecting how matters stood, showed even more than his usual devotion to my interests. The fellow was faithful, and when fully aroused, clever enough to be an able assistant. I congratulated myself again and again on my own sagacity in having had him instructed in Russian, for his knowledge of the language was invaluable to me now; it made possible the successful execution of my scheme. He disguised himself as a messenger from Naryshkin, so as to gain admittance into the Ramodanofsky house; for it was necessary for me to be assured that Zénaïde and her companion were not incar-

cerated there; moreover, it was probable that, in any case, he could pick up valuable information among the serfs. There was very little risk that he would be recognized, and I could rely implicitly on his skill in extricating himself from any ordinary difficulty. But, hopeful as I was of this adventure, it was barren of results. Pierrot obtained admission to the house without trouble, and managed to make a thorough investigation, easily satisfying himself that neither Zénaïde nor mademoiselle was there; and further, he was sure that the servants had no knowledge of their fate, unless it were the man Polotsky, who seemed to enjoy a position of confidence, and was too thoroughly disliked and distrusted by his fellow-servants to share his secrets with them. Pierrot was plainly disappointed by the unfruitfulness of his mission, and I was in a state of desperation. I thought of a dozen expedients, but rejected them all as impossible; on every hand I was confronted by a blank wall. Although I was convinced that Zénaïde had been spirited away by some one against her will, there was no proof that she had not left Von Gaden's house voluntarily, regretting her confidence in me. Clearly, I had no right to pursue her in her flight, and no authority upon which to base an appeal to

the Czarevna Sophia, who seemed my only resource.

In the midst of these reflections, Pierrot announced the arrival of two visitors, and hoping for tidings of some sort, I went at once to see them. They were Dr. von Gaden and Peter Lykof. I was surprised to see the latter, but remembering the warning in the Kremlin, greeted him with cordiality; I intended to excuse myself to him, however, and speak alone to the Jew about the disappearance of Zénaïde, but Von Gaden forestalled me by speaking plainly before Lykof, which astonished and annoyed me.

"Have you any news of Mademoiselle Ramodanofsky?" he asked hastily. "Is there any sign of them, or of their probable fate?"

I looked at Lykof, and the doctor, seeing my glance, smiled.

"Speak without reserve," he said at once; "we are all friends."

But Lykof came forward.

"M. le Vicomte is right," he said, with a dignity of manner that made his tall figure suddenly imposing. He stood in the center of the room, the light full on his scarred cheek and broad brow and keen eyes, — a man of iron.

"I owe you, at least, the truth, M. de Brousson," he said slowly; "no one has a better right to inquire into the fate of Zénaïde than I, for I am her father, Feodor Sergheievitch Ramodanofsky."

CHAPTER XVIII.

FEODOR SERGHEIEVITCH RAMODANOVSKY.

I TOOK a step backward and stared at him in surprise. My feelings were strangely confused, and in that first moment I did not realize how completely the situation was transformed by this revelation; the only thought that presented itself to me was that I saw Zénaïde's father. The boyar's strong face was without its mask of repose, and was full of deep emotion. Before I had collected myself he spoke again.

"I am greatly indebted to you, M. le Vicomte," he said. "I owe you my life, for it is probable that Polotsky would have murdered me that night; and now Von Gaden tells me that I owe you my daughter's escape from a loathsome and degrading marriage."

"I pray that she may have escaped," I said, "but this disappearance alarms me greatly."

"We have just learned it," Von Gaden

remarked. "Ramodanofsky had but now decided to announce his identity to his daughter, when my wife told us of your discovery."

I explained to them my abortive attempt to learn something at the Ramodanofsky house, and of Pierrot's suspicion that Polotsky knew more than the other servants, but would not reveal it.

"Polotsky must be secured, then," Feodor said at once; "he is an abominable wretch, and deserves nothing so much as torture."

Looking at the boyar's face, I recognized the fact that his nerves were not so delicately strung as to shudder at the most refined cruelty, and fancied that the steward would find little mercy at his hands. Polotsky would be difficult to capture, however, for his experience with us had probably made him wary; nevertheless, we soon fixed upon a plan for securing him. Pierrot and Ramodanofsky's servant, Michael, were deputed to lie in wait for the wretch and bring him to us; the only danger seeming to be Michael's ferocious hatred of his enemy. The man had accompanied the boyar to my quarters, and he and Pierrot were at once despatched with instructions to secure Polotsky as soon as possible. Ramodanofsky went to the anteroom to give a last word of

warning to his servant, and I found myself alone with the Jewish doctor.

"It appears that dead men rise at their pleasure in Russia," I remarked dryly.

Von Gaden smiled. "It is a strange history, but I was not wrong in my supposition," he replied; "Vladimir did nearly murder the boyar, and did compass his ruin."

"Undoubtedly," I returned; "but how has he hidden him all these years?"

"It is easy to obliterate a ruined man, M. de Brousson," replied the boyar himself, for, entering unobserved, he had overheard my question. "My life has been checkered by black misfortunes, and my identity almost destroyed by the villainy of Vladimir."

"I beg pardon, monsieur," I said at once, "for the question that would have seemed unwarranted from a stranger if addressed to you; but Dr. von Gaden has told me of your apparent death, therefore your re-appearance naturally overwhelmed me with amazement."

"I have been as good as dead," replied Ramodanofsky, an expression of stern sadness coming over his face. "After I was stricken down in my own courtyard, by my brother's hand, I lay in a trance, and on my recovery, found myself in a convict's garb and in prison. My efforts

to proclaim my identity and obtain justice were scouted as the vagaries of a madman. It was impossible to gain redress; impossible to reach the proper authorities with my complaint. I had not only ceased to be a free man, but it seemed as if I had ceased to be even a human being! I have eaten the bitter bread of humiliation and exile. If I am no longer merciful and just as other men, it is because I have received neither mercy nor justice. Hunted like a wild beast, and treated as one, it seems to me a marvel that I have retained the semblance of a man. There was no chance of escape for years, and when it came at last, so worn out and broken was I, that I would scarcely have embraced my opportunity but for the thought of my child. There was no hope of justice from the late czar or his father; but the Czarevna Sophia is willing to propitiate the older nobles, and I represent a class that has had little friendship for her."

"Prince Galitsyn knows of your identity, does he not?" I asked, my mind full of the new possibilities.

"Prince Basil is my friend," replied Ramodanovsky; "his father and I were comrades, and it is to him I owe the friendship of the czarevna."

"You have come at the time when you are most needed, monsieur," I said; "you, and you alone, can save your daughter."

"If I had been earlier advised of her danger," he replied, "I should have acted more decisively; as it stands, it is to you that I am beholden, M. de Brousson."

I bowed in acknowledgment, not without a feeling of pleasure that Zénaïde's father was already in my debt. As he stood before us now, in his true character, I was more than ever impressed by the man's dignity, the stern resolution of his brow and mouth, the traces of a handsome youth lost by rugged usage and the disfiguring scar. Yet I was conscious too of a new feeling, which I could not analyze: I was no longer Zénaïde's only chance of escape; here was her natural protector, the one who would have the first voice in deciding my fate. I could not but wonder how much he knew, or imagined, of my feeling for his daughter, meanwhile endeavoring to play the host with what grace I could summon in the midst of my anxiety. I invited my two guests to partake of a light repast, which I noticed the boyar ate calmly, like a man who was accustomed to facing anxieties and difficulties, and whose nerves could remain unshaken in the

midst of disaster; even Von Gaden showed more excitement, and I only made a pretence of eating as a matter of courtesy.

"Your appetite is poor, M. le Vicomte," Ramodanofsky remarked calmly, glancing at my plate.

I made some excuse, speaking of the anxiety of the moment.

"It makes no difference, M. de Brousson," he replied quietly. "I am a good deal of a fatalist. If evil is to happen, it will happen; to eat or to fast will not avert it. If you had been through my bitter experience, you would face any crisis with more composure. Fear or suffering, in anticipation, is a poor method of borrowing trouble, and avails nothing. The only way to conquer misfortune is to meet it with indomitable will."

Looking at his severe scarred face, I could readily fancy his manner of meeting adversity.

"M. de Brousson is young yet," Von Gaden remarked, "and young blood is easily stirred."

I heard footsteps on the stair, and rising from my chair, stood looking at the two men before me.

"*Mon Dieu, gentlemen!*" I exclaimed, "is it a light matter? I could face death, methinks, with a composure equal to your own, but here

is a terrible situation. Mademoiselle Ramodanofsky has disappeared, and we cannot tell what fate may have overtaken her!"

Ramodanofsky rose too, and a look of deep trouble swept over his hard features, refuting my momentary thought that all natural feeling was dead within him. While we stood thus, the door was flung open, and Pierrot, with a disordered and mud-splashed dress, stood upon the threshold.

"M. le Vicomte," he said in a tone of great excitement, addressing me in French, and unconscious that both the other two understood him, "we have trapped the steward, and if you do not come down at once, that Russian devil will fricassee him alive before we can extract any information from him!"

Feodor laughed, startling Pierrot so that he stood staring.

"My good fellow," the boyar said to him in French, "you would fricassee the steward too, if you had as heavy a debt against him as poor Michael has."

Knowing Michael's proclivities, neither Von Gaden nor I delayed, but hurried down the stairs, followed by the boyar. Pierrot directed us to a low room on the ground floor; and before we reached the door, sounds like suppressed

groans, greeting our ears, hastened our steps. When we arrived, a curious scene met our eyes. It was a low, bare room, which had probably been used as a dungeon before ; there was a fire burning on the hearth, and over it hung the white-faced Michael, heating a poker red-hot. Tied in a chair before the fire was the cringing figure of the steward, a miserable heap of cowardice. His shoes and stockings having been removed, I had no doubt about his enemy's intentions ; the abject fear on one face and the fierce exultation on the other were both suggestive, not of men, but of beasts. Von Gaden and I paused on the threshold, arrested by the curious and revolting spectacle ; but Ramodanofsky passed us, and going over to the hearth, checked his servant by a gesture. Michael stood transfixed at his order ; but his fingers still clung lovingly to the handle of the red-hot poker, and his small, cruel eyes never left his enemy, seeming to feast on his agony. Feodor Sergheievitch took his position in front of the prisoner, and standing with his hands behind him, viewed him with cold contempt.

“ Make a full confession, knave,” he said scornfully, “ for equivocation will avail nothing now. Where has your master hidden my daughter ? Answer, for you are at our mercy ! ”

"Ay!" ejaculated the steward, sullenly, and without looking up; "your hour has come, and it will be as easy to die one way as another, so you are quick."

"But we will not be quick," replied the Russian, calmly; "we will be slow, — extremely slow, Polotsky. You shall die as traitors ought to die — as thieves and assassins always die! And be sure it will be ten times more slow — more agonizing — more terrific — if you do not confess. Every moment that you delay adds an hour to your torture, delays just so long the blessed relief of death, which is too good for you!"

Von Gaden and I said nothing, but stood there, silent witnesses of a scene which suggested to both of us the barbarism of the Tartar. We could not doubt, looking at the Russian's cold, composed face, that he would torture his victim if he thought that it was necessary to do so, to extract information, — would torture him as readily as he would look at him. Polotsky lay there before him, cringing like a stricken beast. There was no doubt of his making a full confession, if it was possible for him to tell the truth at all before such a tribunal: his old master looking at him without mercy, and behind him his bitterest foe with a livid face,

as ferocious in its longing for his blood as any wolf's.

"Speak, brute!" exclaimed the boyar, harshly, glancing aside at the red-hot poker in his servant's hand.

"Have mercy on me!" shrieked the wretch, suddenly writhing in his bonds until he faced me. "Have mercy on me, Frenchman! save me, and I will confess all—all!"

Loathsome as the fellow was, I felt some pity. I have never loved the thought of torture; an equal fight, a swift and just retribution, but never such a scene as this! Beneath the Russian noble's cold exterior I saw the savage goaded to hatred and revenge by bitter wrong: relentless, inexorable, relentless.

"Save me," shrieked the wretched steward, "and you shall save her!"

"Do you hear that?" cried Ramodanovsky. "He admits his knowledge of my child's fate! Confess, you villain, or I will burn you with fire!"

I came into the room and spoke to him in French.

"I pray your forbearance, monsieur," I said; "the fellow is too miserable a coward to confess under such a pressure. Leave him to me but a moment, and I think I can promise you the whole truth."

"It is easier to cut his throat if he refuses," exclaimed the boyar, impatiently.

"Time presses, monsieur," I said quietly, "and he is willing to confess to me."

Ramodanofsky stood aside with a gesture of courtesy.

"It is your house, M. le Vicomte," he said with dignity, and made Michael go with him, so that in a moment I was left alone with the prisoner, the red-hot poker gleaming lividly upon the hearthstone.

CHAPTER XIX.

POLOTSKY.

FOR a few moments I stood regarding the wretch in silence. He was a picture of abject and villainous misery; knowing that he was in the hands of his most determined enemies, he fancied a fate as hideous as his own crimes. A man who has been hard and brutal to others is, in his hour of reckoning, the most abject coward on earth. Pierrot had fastened him securely in his chair, and he lay there writhing in his bonds, his face livid, and the cold sweat standing in beads on his brow. To me he was simply repulsive; I felt no pity then, and he saw it, and groaned aloud in his despair.

“Be brief, fellow,” I said coldly; “I have already waited five minutes. Delay will avail you nothing. If you do not confess to me, there are others to find a shorter means to wag your tongue.”

He shuddered, and clenched the chair with his hands.

"Save me," he gasped, "and I will tell you all I know! Save me from those men!"

"I will make no conditions," I retorted calmly. "If you confess, I will not have you tortured here; if you do not, I will turn you over to your old master, and he may do as he pleases with you."

The wretch stared at me wildly, without speaking, and I began to suspect that he was inventing some fable.

"Speak!" I said sharply; "you cannot have a moment longer. Where is Mademoiselle Ramodanofsky?"

"Ah, that is just what I cannot tell, and you will kill me!" he wailed so abjectly that I began to believe that he really could not enlighten me. "I only know that the Boyar Vladimir had her taken away from Dr. von Gaden's house."

"Taken whither?" I demanded fiercely; "a lie will not save you."

"I know no more," he protested wildly; "if you torture me, you can learn no more."

I looked at him coldly. "Perhaps," I said, "you can tell me more about the mode in which Vladimir Sergheievitch learned that mademoiselle, his niece, was at Von Gaden's house at all."

He shrank back, and looked at me like a hunted beast.

"You dogged my footsteps," I went on harshly; "you tracked mademoiselle and her companion to the doctor's house and betrayed them, and now you ask mercy of me with a lie in your mouth!"

"It is not a lie!" he cried, thoroughly cowed. "It is the truth, by our Lady of Kazan! I do not know — but I can tell you of one who does," he added, a gleam of hope showing in his eyes as he realized that he had not yet played his last card and lost.

"Tell me the name at once," I said sternly; "every minute's delay will cost you dear!"

"Be merciful to me, and I will tell you the truth; I can do no more!" he protested pitifully.

"Be quick!" I cried angrily.

"My master and Viatscheslav Naryshkin were obliged to be in attendance at the palace," Polotsky said, "and a dwarf whom they trust —"

"Homyak!" I exclaimed at once.

"Yes, Homyak," he admitted. "He was intrusted with the mission; he was to get Zénaïde Feodorovna and her governess out of the house and take them to some place where yonder

boyar — ” he pointed to the door which separated us from Feodor Ramodanofsky, “ could not find her.”

“ Where is that place? ” I demanded fiercely, glancing at the poker as it lay amid the coals. His eyes followed mine, and I saw him cringe.

“ Master, I do not know! ” he protested wildly. “ But Homyak can tell you all; catch him.”

And he adhered to this, although I pressed him close, until I was satisfied that he had really told all he knew. Then, going out, I closed the door and bade Pierrot guard the prisoner strictly; I was determined that he should not be tortured to death in my house, and I saw Michael lurking in the hall like a wild beast robbed of his prey. Joining Ramodanofsky and Von Gaden, I told them of Polotsky’s confession, and my conviction that he was telling all the truth. The Jew believed it; but I saw that the boyar was dissatisfied, although he had the courtesy to accept my statement as final. A brief consultation followed, all our minds concentrating on the one object, — to liberate Zénaïde.

“ Homyak was at the palace this morning,” I said, “ and we must get hold of him at once, and compel him to guide us to the house.”

"That is impossible," rejoined Von Gaden, quietly. "I know that Homyak was despatched by the Czarina Natalia herself on an errand that will carry him to Troitsa. In the mean time, Zénaïde will be forced to wed Viatscheslav."

Ramodanofsky clenched his hands.

"Never!" he ejaculated fiercely; "I will go at once to Vladimir and force him to surrender her to her father."

Von Gaden plucked his robe. "You cannot do it, boyar," he said calmly; "it will ruin every well-laid plan to move now. The czarina will support Viatscheslav, and this is the hour when Sophia Alexeievna can do least for you. If you go to Vladimir's house, you will risk your own life, and then the wretched fate of your daughter will be assured. Listen to reason, my old friend; we must find some other way."

I had stood a little aside to let them talk; but now I turned to the boyar and found his stern eyes already on my face.

"M. Ramodanofsky," I said quietly, "permit me to undertake this service for you. I will go direct to the boyar's house, and he will scarcely refuse admittance. I can demand, in your name, to be informed of your daughter's

fate, and if it is not told voluntarily, mayhap I can force it from him."

Feodor Sergheievitch did not immediately reply; but I saw that Von Gaden approved my proposal.

"It is the plan most likely to succeed," he said thoughtfully, "and in any case, you will probably learn something."

"M. le Vicomte," the boyar said, turning to me with a dignity which became him well, "I am beholden to you, and it seems that it is best to accept your services. You understand the risk you take for a stranger?" he added, his keen eye searching my face.

I felt the blood burn on my cheek, but I spoke plainly; it was well to have an understanding between us. "M. Ramodanofsky," I said deliberately, "while I am glad to be of service to you in your hour of need, it is for the sake of Mademoiselle Zénarde that I assume this peril, and I am willing to abide by the consequences."

For a moment he was startled by the candor of my reply, and then I saw something like a smile in his cold eyes.

"She will perhaps be able to thank you more effectively than I can," he said quietly; "but remember, M. le Vicomte, that very soon I

shall declare myself, and she will be no longer considered as the heiress of the wealthy Vladimir, but the daughter of a prisoner and an exile, without title or dowry—all forfeited to the crown."

I made an obeisance. "M. Ramodanofsky," I said, "Mademoiselle Zénaïde will ever remain the same, and were she the daughter of the poorest convict in Russia, she would still hold the same place in the regard of Philippe de Brousson."

The cloud lifted from his face, and he held out his hand with a gesture that revealed the courtly grace which must have been his before the years of exile dwarfed and thwarted every natural impulse.

"I thank you, M. le Vicomte," he said, with a grand air; "Zénaïde has at least one friend in her extremity."

As our hands met, I felt a warmer regard for the man than ever before. The fact that he was Zénaïde's father was borne in upon me, and I carried away with me the memory of that strange illumination of the stern face. We left him at my quarters to await my return, Von Gaden walking with me towards Vladimir's house.

"So, M. le Docteur," I said, "you knew the

Boyar Feodor on that night when we rescued him from Polotsky's midnight assault."

Von Gaden smiled. "I recognized him at once," he replied; "his face has changed, but I should have known him anywhere; those eyes and that mouth cannot be forgotten; moreover, I knew the scar."

"From the blow dealt by his brother, I suppose," I said quietly.

"Yes; it is an ugly cut, and it has disfigured a face once handsome, even in its rugged strength. I knew him, but he warned me by a glance to be silent, and since then he has been maturing his own schemes, and has not, it seems to me, been deeply concerned about Zénaïde until this last emergency."

"Perhaps he has not a deep paternal feeling," I remarked; "his years of absence and of suffering might easily make a difference."

"Undoubtedly they have," Von Gaden replied. "Zénaïde is a stranger to him, and, at his best, Ramodanofsky was a man of iron mold; there is not much room for tenderness in a soul like his. But he is roused now, and resents fiercely his brother's effort to thwart him by marrying his daughter to one of his bitter foes."

"Vladimir is aware of his presence here," I

said, recollecting the boyar's face at the czar's funeral, when he saw his brother in the crowd.

"Ay, he prompted Polotsky's attempt to murder Feodor; his is the master hand; all these crimes are his, the other men are but his tools."

"I could never understand Lykof, as he called himself," I said thoughtfully; "but tell me why he has identified himself with the Streltsi, who hate the boyars?"

"Feodor Sergheievitch has suffered much at the hands of his own class," Von Gaden replied quietly. "He has a faithful follower in one of the regiments of the Streltsi, and he has assumed that disguise for safety, and also, I think, to gain a thorough knowledge of the schemes on foot. He hopes much from the Miloslavskys,—more than I do. Prince Galitsyn is his friend; but in these days, no man can feel his future a certainty."

"Right and justice are on his side," I remarked, musingly.

Von Gaden smiled. "Right is on the side of the blind czarevitch, and yet what would Russia do with such a ruler? She would be doomed to an indefinite regency, to intrigues, strife, division. It is not always right, M. le Vicomte, but might which conquers."

"You are a Naryshkin partisan," I said lightly; "Russia might do worse than leave her destiny in the hands of a wise regent —"

"You mean the Czarevna Sophia," interposed Von Gaden. He stopped short and confronted me. We were in one of the narrow, tortuous streets; it was mid-day, but all was quiet; the life and business of the city was not in this quarter. The Jew's thoughtful face was marked with unusual emotion.

"M. de Brousson," he said in a low voice, pointing his long finger at the Kremlin, "it will avail nothing to advance that ambitious woman. It will avail nothing to set aside the czarina dowager, to crush the Naryshkins, to excite the Streltsi, and appeal to every passion of the rabble. The future ruler of the empire is yonder: a boy now, little considered and set aside, but the ruler born, and every inch a czar. I know the lad, I can read destiny in his eye; unless the hand of an assassin strike down that young life, this distracted country will see in him the dawn of a new power. You have the grand monarch; but not even your great Louis will be greater than Peter Alexeivitch."

Looking back now, after forty years, upon that scene, I see again the Jew's face as he uttered

his prophecy, received by me then as the vagary of an excitable and dreamy man, but remembered in later years as the first proclamation of Peter the Great. His outburst over, Von Gaden walked beside me dreamily.

"The city is more quiet," I remarked, "since the *pravezh*; the Streltsi seem to be satisfied."

He shook his head with an air of gloom which reminded me of Pierrot.

"It is the calm before the storm," he replied. "Every one is calling on Matveief and bringing him presents; but his son has said that it is 'sweet money on a sharp knife,' and that is the truth, although it is unwise for him to say it, but young blood is hot."

We were now approaching the Ramodanofsky house, and I looked at the gloomy exterior with a new sensation; how soon would it receive its true master? Von Gaden's thoughts were now more practical.

"You must be cautious, M. le Vicomte," he said; "although I feel assured that Vladimir will not offer open violence on account of your station, and the estimation in which you are held in high places. Secret attacks are in his line, and Feodor tells me he has already warned you. Vladimir will be aware that your coming is known, and will scarcely take violent meas-

ures; but beware of him, he is a desperate and a relentless man; more smooth and courtly than his brother, but the deeper traitor."

I touched my sword. "I have a friend with me," I said quietly; "but I anticipate no trouble, beyond the difficulty of obtaining any satisfaction."

"We cannot tell," Von Gaden replied; "but for Zénaïde's sake be cautious. I do not myself believe that he will attempt to do anything until he finds out what his brother intends to do, and I fear no injury to the young girl; it would profit him nothing, and would bring down the wrath of the czarina upon him. He is far too adroit and diplomatic to ruin his own game. But be cautious, M. le Vicomte, be cautious!"

And with this warning in my ears, I left him, and passing on, entered the courtyard gates and stood before the boyar's door.

CHAPTER XX.

A FRIENDLY CUP.

I HAD repeated my summons twice before it was answered by a solemn-looking servant, who hesitated before admitting me. But I assumed an air of authority, and that, with my foreign title, seemed to have weight, for he finally conducted me into the large room, through the window of which I had witnessed Ramodanofsky's consultation with Viatschesslav; and I could scarcely forbear a smile when I thought of the irregular manner in which I had first gained my knowledge of the interior of this house. The apartment in which I stood was singularly gloomy, although furnished with considerable luxury and refinement. There were indications of the time when Zénaïde's mother had been brought home a bride. Here was a cabinet that I recognized at once as French, and a clock, and especially a long, narrow mirror opposite, which reflected the gloomy interior, the rich hangings, and the

polished table in the center of the room. Beside this table stood a large carved chair, which was, I fancied, the boyar's favorite seat. It seemed as if not even a rare ray of Russian sunlight penetrated here; somber, rich, forbidding, it was a spot that neither suggested nor encouraged hospitality.

I had waited only a few moments, when a low door at the further end of the room was opened, and Vladimir Sergheievitch advanced towards me. He had a dignity and grace of bearing that suggested a painful contrast to the more heroic brother; this man had profited by his life at court and his stolen wealth. He had, too, a repose of manner that showed a far greater amount of self-control than Feodor possessed. I saw also a resemblance in the two faces, although Vladimir's eyes were more restless and uncertain, his lips thinner and more bloodless, and the peculiarity of his black, pointed eyebrows did not mar the nobility of the elder boyar's wide forehead. Now, as he came towards me with a scowl over his eyes, his black brows struck down sharply to the bridge of his nose in two oblique lines. An evil face and a sinister eye! He responded to my salutation easily, and asked me to be seated as calmly as if he had never played a part in my imprison-

ment, and was not an accessory to Viatscheslav's insolence at the palace. I debated in my mind whether it was best to begin the interview in a hostile manner or not, and after a moment's reflection, accepted the chair that he had indicated. He opened the conversation with perfect composure.

"To what am I indebted for the honor of this visit, M. le Vicomte?" he asked quietly, a gleam of sinister amusement showing in his eyes.

"I have a mission to perform, monsieur," I replied, "otherwise—"

"You would not have come," he interrupted with a sardonic smile. "I assumed as much. However, we will waive all that, and proceed to business."

I bowed formally. "I should be glad," I said, "to conclude it as speedily as possible. I am commissioned by the Boyar Feodor Serghievitch Ramodanofsky to inquire of you the present residence of his daughter."

I paused to note the effect of my words, but there was absolutely none, although I had no doubt that he was surprised that his brother had thrown aside his disguise. He sat looking at me with an expression of sinister amusement still on his face, and twirling his moustache

with his long, tapering fingers. I saw that I should be compelled to take the aggressive.

"You are doubtless prepared, monsieur," I said, "to furnish an account of your guardianship of Mademoiselle Ramodanofsky to her father, and to surrender the young lady to his protection."

Vladimir smiled, measuring me with a glance which was peculiarly exasperating.

"I am entirely unprepared for your visit, M. de Brousson," he said calmly; "singularly so, in fact, since the person from whom you say you come has been dead fifteen years. It is the first time that I have ever received an envoy from a ghost, and I find it, M. le Vicomte, rather amusing."

"This is idle, M. Ramodanofsky," I exclaimed impatiently; "you have more reason than any one to know that the boyar is not dead. It would be more rational to meet me on the ground of common sense than to fence with such an absurd declaration."

"My view and yours are naturally different, M. le Vicomte," he replied with admirable composure. "As you remark, I have more reason than any one to know that my half brother is dead. You have been deceived by an impostor; you will find it difficult, however,

to convince any one else that the official dead in Russia rise so quickly."

I looked at his calmly sneering face with a sensation of baffled rage. It was a simple matter for him to assume this position, and I did not know how easily he might sustain it.

"Nevertheless, I believe that there is occasionally a chance of reviving the official dead, and a train of unpleasant circumstances also, M. Ramodanofsky," I said deliberately, meeting his eyes.

"There is generally some personal risk about such resurrections, M. le Vicomte," he replied composedly; "and I might remark further, that this is a specially unfavorable season for such operations."

His manner was exasperating me to a point where I knew that I was likely to allow my anger to get the better of my discretion. I rose from my chair, and stood confronting him.

"All this is foreign to my mission, monsieur," I said with what temper I could command. "Feodor Sergheievitch is as much alive as you are, and demands his daughter at your hands. It is a simple matter for you to give me the desired information, and time presses."

Vladimir laughed softly to himself, a laugh

that did not show in his eyes or relax the expression of his face.

"A very simple matter, M. le Vicomte," he replied quietly; "but you forget that Mademoiselle Zénaïde is betrothed to the cousin of the czar, and it is possible that there may be a good deal to say about surrendering her to an impostor. It is not probable that you really believe that my brother, the saints rest his soul! is alive and in Moscow?"

Fortunately, the answer that was on my lips was checked by the entrance of a serf bringing the inevitable *vodka* and caviare that were always served to every guest in a Russian house, and the fact that I was an unwelcome one did not prevent the usual courtesy being tendered to me. The serf, placing the refreshments on the table and filling the cups, withdrew. The boyar invited me to partake, but at the moment I had no thought of accepting his hospitality.

"Of course I know that you are aware of your brother's presence in Moscow, M. Ramodanof-sky," I said haughtily, "and it seems to me wiser for you to acknowledge his authority over his own daughter. You know him well enough to understand that he will tolerate no interference with his rights, and he demands

that you surrender Mademoiselle Ramodanofsky into his hands. Your steward Polotsky is in his custody, and has confessed enough to make the rest easy."

For the first time, I saw a change, sharp and sudden, in that inscrutable face; whatever the steward knew, it was too much for the master's peace of mind. I could see the contending emotions in those cruel, narrow eyes, the contraction of the bloodless lips. I waited, seeing that he was hesitating over some new move. In a moment he rose, and going to the French cabinet, fumbled at the drawers. I walked away across the room and waited, willing to give him a little grace. There was something about the man which held my interest, and stayed my anger; was it the courage of despair? Without a word, he came back from the cabinet with some papers in his hands and stood turning them over by the table; what revelation did he contemplate? My curiosity being roused, I watched him, feigning all the while to look out of the window into the court; but from where I was, I could cast a sidelong glance into the French mirror, and see him as he stood there in his dark, rich dress with the lace ruffles at his throat and hands, the gold of the Oriental embroidery on his robe making fan-

tastic arabesques upon the purple velvet, and his white face standing out against the somber background; a forbidding picture, yet not without a certain majestic dignity and power. While I watched, I saw him bend over the cups of *vodka*, a swift movement followed by instant repose. Then he turned his face towards me.

"Be seated, M. le Vicomte," he said, "and we will talk this matter over."

I approached the table and inclined my head as he pushed the cup of *vodka* towards me.

"You have neglected to fasten your cabinet door, monsieur," I said carelessly, "and the papers are falling out."

He turned his head quickly, and seeing the door pushed open by the protruding papers, he stepped back and closed it. In that moment I changed the cups. He heard the click and glanced around sharply, but I was merely tapping the table with my finger.

"I am waiting your pleasure, M. Ramondanofsky," I said, as he returned to his place; "a word of explanation, and this interview is closed with equal relief to both."

"We will drink first, M. le Vicomte," he replied with cold courtesy of manner, raising his cup and watching me narrowly.

Without hesitation I raised mine and drank. He drained his, and setting the cup aside, turned to me, his hand resting easily on the papers at his side.

"M. de Brousson," he said, with a sudden grace of manner, "I am not ignorant of the cause of your interest in my ward. I was also of your age once, and I understand it," he added with a smile which struck me as diabolical; "but you are making a mistake to waste time with my brother; he is as good as dead, and the party in power will never recognize him. Zénaïde is my ward; you should conciliate me."

I watched him keenly; what new game was this? And what was the change which was coming over his face? Always pale, it was livid now, and the lips were purple. I saw his hands shaking like an old man's, and he began himself to stare at them, a kind of horror growing in his eyes until his whole expression changed; the smiling mask dropped, and I saw, instead, the face of a demon, every devilish passion contending with the abject fear that I had seen in Polotsky's, and the cords in his throat stood out.

"I am ill!" he cried thickly; "call for help — or I shall choke — water!"

It was his last word; he fell down on his chair, his whole figure writhing in the convulsion that choked his utterance. There was a small pitcher of water at hand, and I dashed some on his face, and loosened the collar that he was tearing with his fingers. I had seen death too often not to recognize it; even while I knelt beside him, I saw his eyes grow fixed and his jaw fall. He was dead in three minutes after the first paroxysm, and I laid him on the floor and straightened his limbs.

My impulse to call for help was checked by prudence, and by a sudden inspiration too. Looking in the cup, I saw some dregs, and was not slow to draw my own conclusions. For a few moments I stood looking at the body; his face was still distorted, and there was no beauty of repose about the features, and the dignity that had clothed his figure in a false nobility was destroyed forever by that great leveller of humanity. I shuddered, seeing the fate he had so quickly planned for me. The horror of such a corpse made the place a nightmare to me. I threw his handkerchief over his face, and locking the door into the main hall to delay the discovery of the body, I went out by the low door by which he had entered, and securing that, put the key in my pocket, so constituting

myself his jailer, as he had once been mine, and shutting the secret from the world. Once out of the place, I stopped an instant to reflect upon my next step. I found myself in a small ante-room, silent and deserted, and through the open door opposite, I saw another room beyond.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE PRISONER.

I DETERMINED to search the house, and assure myself that Zénaïde was not incarcerated in any part of it. All possibility of obtaining information from Ramodanofsky was at an end forever, but I had now the opportunity to examine the premises. Passing through the anterooms, I entered a large apartment which had evidently been his bedroom, and which showed signs of recent occupation. On a small table beside the bed lay a bunch of keys, and these I appropriated. Opening a small door behind the high bedstead, I found myself in a long corridor, which seemed to lead in the direction of the kitchen, with several doors opening upon it. I was impressed by the silence of the place; not a sound reached my ears. I walked along, trying the doors; two opened into a large banqueting-room, and a third upon a short passage which I knew must lead towards the wing. I mended my pace now, and going down this

hall, came into the rooms below Zénaïde's, already familiar to me; they were all vacant, and I ascended the stairs, not without a thought of that first night when I had stumbled up those steps and found Zénaïde. But this time her rooms were deserted and dreary. I searched every corner of this wing, even the place where I had formerly been confined, but without result; it looked the same in every spot as it had on the evening on which I had taken the two women away, — only, as it had proved, to lead them into further disaster. Satisfied that there was no clew here, I came slowly down the stairs; near the foot a sound in the hall roused me, and I looked about just in time to see a man trying to avoid me. He was one of the serfs, and I spoke to him in Russian; he stopped in a startled way, and stared at me as if uncertain what to do. I was determined to carry things with a high hand.

"Your master wishes me to see Mademoiselle Zénaïde," I said sharply, "and you can conduct me to her."

The fellow stared at me more stupidly than before.

"Do you hear me, sirrah?" I exclaimed impatiently. "It will not be well for you to delay obedience to a Ramodanofsky."

He evidently knew this, for he roused himself.

"I will go willingly, master," he said humbly. "when the boyar tells me the way. I do not know where the young lady is."

His sincerity was too obvious to doubt, and I saw at once that I was face to face with a new difficulty. I determined, however, to probe him.

"If you do not know where Mademoiselle Ramodanofsky is," I said sharply, "perhaps you can take me to Mademoiselle Eudoxie."

His face brightened at once.

"Oh, yes, your excellency, I can do that!" he exclaimed in a relieved tone.

It was my turn to be surprised now, but I followed up my advantage at once.

"Take me to her, then!" I cried harshly.

"Follow me, master," he said quietly, and to my surprise turned back into the main part of the house.

The thought that he might be trying to entrap me made me draw and cock my pistol as I followed close at his heels. He conducted me past the boyar's rooms to a dark, narrow stone stair, leading down, as I concluded, to the cellars. I did not like the appearance of it, but reflected that my archenemy was stiff and

stark, and this man seemed nothing more than an ignorant servant. He did not stop to see if I followed, and was already halfway down the steps when I began the descent, feeling my way cautiously, and keeping my weapon ready as I went. Having reached the lower floor, he led me through a tortuous passage in the dark and damp cellars, pausing at last before a heavy door.

"She is here," he said, pointing at it with his finger.

"Open it, you knave!" I said sharply.

"Where is the key?" he retorted sullenly.

For the moment I could almost have laughed in the bitterness of my chagrin at my own folly, and then thinking of the boyar's keys, I drew out the bunch and began to fumble with them.

"That is the key," he said, indicating a large one; and as I loosened it from the others he put it in the lock, and in a moment the heavy door stood open, revealing a small room dimly lighted by the lantern swinging from a chain in the center of the ceiling.

Taking the precaution to remove the key from the lock, I walked in without ceremony. For a moment I thought that I had been duped, for the cell was empty; then I saw that it had

another door, which stood ajar, and I struck the hilt of my sword upon it with a blow that made an echo in the gloomy place. Instantly there was a sound in the inner room, and Mademoiselle Eudoxie's startled face appeared at the door. At the sight of me, she uttered a plaintive shriek and fell fainting in my arms. Cursing my luck and her folly, I carried her into the other cell and laid her on the rough couch there. Finding some water, I dashed it liberally in her face, and was relieved to see signs of recovery. My conscience reproached me for my anger, too, when I saw how white and miserable she looked, like a woman who had endured much; even her wiry little curls hung limp and dishevelled. She recovered almost as quickly as she had fainted, and when fully conscious, clung to my hand with feverish energy.

"How did you find me?" she moaned. "I had given up all hope, and expected to die here in the cellar, if that awful man did not kill me outright. And oh, tell me! where is Zénaïde?"

"That is the question that I was about to put to you, mademoiselle," I replied gloomily; "I hoped devoutly that you could tell me where to find her."

"Alas!" she cried, looking at me with new

anxiety, "I have not seen her since we were so roughly parted, and I have constantly hoped that she escaped."

She was quivering all over with nervous excitement, and I saw that I must be patient with her. I sat down beside her.

"Come, mademoiselle," I said, as gently as if she had been a child, "tell me as clearly as you can all that happened after I left you at Von Gaden's house. Only in this way can you help me to save Zénaïde."

Thus adjured, she tried to collect her thoughts. "I have been through so much, Monsieur Philippe," she said, pressing her hands over her eyes, "it seems as if I could hardly think. Madame von Gaden was very kind to us, and gave us three rooms opening into each other; and in the corner of the farther one was a curtained alcove. Zénaïde is very quick, and she noticed this at once; and examining it, told me that there must be a secret door there. It was an evil hour when she found it, for she never rests until she finds out all about her surroundings; she worked at it until, in some way, she found the spring and opened it. I was terribly frightened, and did not want to stay, for I began to distrust the Von Gadens, but she laughed; she has such faith

in you, Philippe, that she would not believe that you would put us in a dangerous place. And after a while we went to sleep, and were not disturbed. It was not until after breakfast, the next morning, that anything happened; and then, while she and I were talking, we were startled by a tap on the secret door. Zénaïde rose to answer it; she was always fearless, and would not listen to my remonstrance. She went to the panel and asked who was there. Immediately a voice said, ‘A private message from the Vicomte de Brousson to Mademoiselle Ramodanofsky.’ ‘How shall we know that you come from the Vicomte?’ asked Zénaïde, promptly, although I clung to her, and begged to be allowed to call Madame von Gaden. ‘I have M. de Brousson’s signet, mademoiselle,’ replied the voice behind the panel—”

“My signet!” I exclaimed, interrupting her.

“Yes, Monsieur Philippe,” she replied tearfully, “your signet! And the knave had it, too, for I recognized it myself.”

“Fool that I was!” I exclaimed. “It is partly my fault, then, for I ought to have told you that my signet was stolen on the night in which I was dragged here and imprisoned. But go on, mademoiselle; tell me all.”

“At that announcement Zénaïde would no

longer listen to reason, but opened the panel. There stood a slight young fellow, not much more than a lad; and sure enough, in his hand lay your signet. He could speak nothing but Russian, but could say ‘mademoiselle’ and ‘monsieur le vicomte;’ and that, with your signet, made me think that he had been about your person, for these Russian youths know nothing but their own tongue. He told a straight story; he said that he brought a verbal message, because you were afraid to write anything, thinking he might be captured. He represented that you had just discovered that the Von Gadens were treacherous, and dared not leave us in that house an hour longer. You had been summoned by the Czarevna Sophia, he said, and could not come, but had sent him to conduct us to your lodgings, there to wait until you could take us to the Kremlin, the czarevna having expressed her willingness to protect us. Zénaïde drew me aside, and we discussed the situation; we both thought the message genuine. I recognized the signet, and his perfect acquaintance with your affairs disarmed our natural suspicions. Zénaïde questioned him about his discovery of the secret stair, but he said that you knew of it; and knowing that you had been intimate with the Von Gadens,

we concluded that the message was true. Our decision was hastened by the messenger; he informed us that Von Gaden had left the house, and it was thought that he was communicating with Viatscheslav Naryshkin; therefore we had not a moment to lose. "Alas!" cried mademoiselle, interrupting herself and wringing her hands, "if we had only delayed!" And the good woman stopped to wipe away her tears.

"Continue, mademoiselle," I said, with some impatience; "regret is of no avail now; we must only try to mend the evil."

"The rest is soon told," she said sorrowfully. "Zénaïde's impetuosity and my folly carried the day; I ought to have known that you would come yourself. We gathered up our wraps, and veiling ourselves, followed our young guide down a narrow flight of stairs which led into a kind of cellar—"

"I know, mademoiselle," I interrupted. "I have examined them but a few hours since. You went out by the trap-door?"

"Alas!" she exclaimed, "I never knew how we were taken out. You know how dark it is there? The boy had guided us with a light, but when we reached the cellar, he suddenly extinguished it, and I heard Zénaïde spring back towards the stairs; she had evidently

divined our peril before I did. There was a struggle in the darkness, and I shrieked; the next instant I was seized and gagged, and then came the hardest blow; I did not know what they did to my poor girl. I was dragged off to the Ramodanofsky carriage, which stood in the lane, and that fiend Polotsky brought me here and locked me up. And I have been in agony of mind about Zénaïde, and expecting to be killed every moment. What shall we do now, Monsieur Philippe?"

I was pacing the cell. One thing relieved me: Ramodanofsky's servants had captured them, and therefore it was not probable that Zénaïde had suffered any injury at their hands. I had hoped to learn much more from mademoiselle, but her story had been slow in telling and barren of any clue to Zénaïde's fate.

"Come, mademoiselle," I said, "we must go at once to Dr. von Gaden's. Every hour counts."

She rose gladly enough, and then stood looking at me. "Where is the boyar?" she exclaimed suddenly. "How did you come here?"

"The Boyar Vladimir Sergheievitch is dead," I replied quietly, "and the Boyar Feodor is alive again."

She stared at me as if I had lost my senses. Even at that moment, I could not forbear to

smile. There was something about mademoiselle that could be amusing even in the midst of tragedy.

"Vladimir died by his own act," I said, and told her briefly of his attempt to poison me, frustrated only by the telltale mirror.

"And the Boyar Feodor, Zénaïde's father, what of him?" she exclaimed, as if she could no longer trust her ears.

"He lives," I replied; "but it will take too long to tell you all here, mademoiselle; we must go away."

"Gladly, Monsieur Philippe," she replied. "I looked upon this as a living tomb; I had said my prayers, and was composing my mind to die when you came."

While she spoke, we had reached the outer room, and I led the way to the door. It was closed. My heart misgave me at once, but I tried to open it with all my strength, refusing to believe in so wretched a calamity; but it did not yield an inch: it had been fastened on the outside. It was too solid to shake, and though I beat it, and shouted for the knave who let me in, and tried the key in the lock, it was all to no purpose. We were caught like rats in a trap, through my own stupidity. I was ashamed to face mademoiselle, but when I

turned despairingly from the door, I saw that she had accepted the inevitable with more resignation. She was kneeling on the floor telling her beads; but I was too anxious to submit to her religion as a consolation.

"Is there no other door?" I asked sharply.
"We must get out."

She shook her head. "There is no other door, Philippe; and now that the boyar is dead, Polotsky will starve us to death."

"Polotsky!" I exclaimed, with more impatience than courtesy, "Polotsky is safe enough at my house, watched by Pierrot. They must find us here before long; but meanwhile, Zénaïde! Every minute tells! Fool that I was!"

She was more calm than I. Her previous experience had schooled her, and she looked at me sadly.

"Never trust one of these people," she said quietly. "Vladimir Sergheievitch never had an honest servant in all the years that I have lived here teaching my poor Zénaïde. They are all thieves and rogues. A rogue never had an honest man to serve him."

And with this, she returned to her beads, and I walked the room in a fever of anxiety and anger; exasperated rather than comforted by her evidently despairing resignation.

CHAPTER XXII.

BAFFLED.

THERE was a window in the inner cell, a narrow slit in the solid wall on a level with my eyes, and barred with iron. It served only to admit the air and a faint gleam of light, for it had no outlook but the blank wall of the court, not six feet away. Even without the bars it was too narrow to permit a man to squeeze through, and it afforded us little comfort. Locked in between those massive walls, no sound reached us from the house; it was as silent as the tomb. I returned again and again to my attempts to force the door, although common sense told me that they were futile. Mademoiselle Eudoxie increased my exasperation by her hopeless demeanor. It was manifest that she thought we could easily be forgotten and left to perish in the cellar of a Russian house; but I had some confidence in Von Gaden, and more in Pierrot; I was sure that my fate

would be investigated. If there had only been the Boyar Feodor Sergheievitch, I should have felt differently, for he was cast in too stern a mold to waste time or anxiety upon me: the Tartar was too close to the surface to permit any tender feelings; his years of suffering had swept away the finer qualities, leaving only the heroic nature. As I paced that narrow cell in the heat of my anger and disappointment, I still could not avoid picturing the meeting between father and daughter—if it ever happened. With her French blood and her French training, what would Zénaïde Feodorovna think of this rugged man? There could be no foundation of natural affection between them, since they had been separated when Zénaïde was too young to understand the tie which bound her to the stern boyar. What a strange meeting it would be!

Mademoiselle had retired to the inner cell and left me in possession of the other, but came now to the door between, and stood looking at me. I noticed again that her curls were hanging limp, as if they sympathized with her discouragement.

“I have been thinking,” she said, in a tremulous voice, “and I fear that her uncle’s death will be a bad thing for Zénaïde.”

"I should think it would be the best thing that could happen," I said.

She shook her head. "It leaves her to Viatscheslav," she replied quietly; "he is her betrothed, and her guardian dead, you see what will happen? He and the czarina can force the marriage just as easily as before."

I flung out my hands impatiently.

"Why tell me this now?" I cried, "when I am helpless, and there is no refuge but the hope that her father will act more discreetly than I have done."

"Don't blame yourself, Philippe," mademoiselle said gently; "we cannot always foresee and prevent every evil. It is true that it would have been better to have left me to my fate, and pressed on in search of the young girl."

She spoke sadly, and there was an implied reproach in her words which smote me. I took her hand and pressed it warmly.

"You forget, mademoiselle," I said, "that your safety is dear to Zénaïde and to me. Do you think that Philippe de Brousson forgets old friends?"

The tears came into the excellent woman's eyes.

"Ah, Philippe," she said sorrowfully, "I am

one of the unfortunates of this world who usually get only the crumbs from the rich man's table, and it touches me to be remembered. But you were ever true-hearted. I cannot look at you, broad-shouldered, bronzed man that you are, without seeing the little fair-haired boy playing among the roses in the garden of the château."

"Keep the memory fresh, mademoiselle," I said lightly; "think of me ever at my best."

She went back to her room, and for a little while I was left to my reflections, and then she came again to the door.

"I hear a noise of some kind," she said, with some excitement in her voice. "It comes from the streets, and is like the sound of some great disturbance. What can it be?"

Her first words had raised the hope that our rescuers were at hand; and, even failing that, I was eager to catch every murmur from the outside world. We both went to the narrow window, and listened. It was now dark, and we could not even see the wall, which served to dull the sounds coming to us on the night wind; it was a deep, low murmur, like the growling of a tempest, far off, but unmistakable. We listened intently; both of us had the same thought.

"It must be a riot," mademoiselle exclaimed, a thrill of excitement in her voice.

It was the twenty-fourth of May, 1682, and we were listening to the first rumblings of the storm that was to break on the morrow upon the Kremlin, and in a few hours work a mighty change.

"That is the sound of a multitude," I remarked as we stood there, so anxious and so helpless. "I know that trouble has been brewing for weeks, and it may culminate to-night."

"Holy Virgin!" ejaculated mademoiselle, "what will become of my poor lamb?"

I turned away sharply; a hundred horrid thoughts assailed me, and I was in prison! Oh, the anguish of such enforced quiet! Where was Ramodanofsky, and that knave Pierrot? I was beside myself with futile rage. I went once more to the door and beat upon it, not with any real hope of escape, but it served as a vent to my uncontrollable excitement. To be a man, and caged at such a moment! I envied mademoiselle her tears and her resignation; in sooth, it is easier for a woman to be a martyr. She is accustomed to the surrender to evil destiny, bowed into submission to the stronger will; but with a man it is different. I paced that narrow cell, inwardly raving at

myself and Von Gaden; if no one else imagined my misadventure, he was keen enough to divine it, and I saw no excuse for this miserable delay. Could it be that they had come, and partially searched the house, and gone away again without discovering the cellar dungeons? The thought drove the cold sweat out on my forehead. We might easily starve there without any one hearing our outcries, and the villain who had locked us in would have fled from the new master of the house, and was even now, perhaps, laughing at my folly in leaving him outside a door. And in the mean while, what would happen to Zénaïde? I thought of her constantly; her fair face and blue eyes and her long flaxen hair stood out before me like a picture on the dark background of my despair. How little I had accomplished to save her from the fate which threatened her! How easily I had permitted my enemies to outwit me! Fool that I was!—but for the French mirror, I might have been lying now stiff and stark in Vladimir's place. I had been such a blunderer in all else, I marveled that I had not fallen a victim in this also.

The hours dragged wearily past, and it must have been near midnight when mademoiselle came again to the door.

"There is something going on in the house," she said breathlessly. "I have been listening at my window, and have heard noises in the court."

I was alert at once. "Then we must make an outcry, mademoiselle," I said, "or we shall never be found. Go to the window and shriek for help, and I will beat upon the door."

"Is it wise, Philippe?" she asked fearfully. "It might be some enemy, and it would be so easy to demolish us."

"Nonsense, mademoiselle!" I exclaimed impatiently. "Is it better to perish of hunger? Moreover, it must be our friends; they have been long in coming, too. Think of Zénaïde, mademoiselle, and help me to rouse them."

Thus adjured, she went to the window, and I heard her calling for help in her thin French voice, in the intervals of the noise that I made in beating recklessly upon the door. I kept it up until I was worn out, and pausing for breath, heard steps in the hall; and in another moment the bars were removed from the outside, and the door opened, to reveal Pierrot and Von Gaden.

"You have given us a terrible fright, M. de Brousson," the latter remarked, a look of intense relief coming over his face at the sight of me.

"I hoped you would find me sooner," I exclaimed, casting a glance that was not without rebuke at Pierrot.

"I did not know your errand, M. le Vicomte," he returned stolidly; "if I had, I should not have waited for orders."

"It was my fault," protested Von Gaden; "I did not want Ramodanofsky to come here, and I counted confidently on your ability to execute your mission."

"Too confidently, M. le Docteur," I said dryly; "I have proved myself but a fool. But we have no time to lose. Come, mademoiselle, you will be glad to be out of this cage."

"You have found her?" exclaimed Von Gaden, eagerly; but his face fell at the sight of Mademoiselle Eudoxie, who came out in a state of collapse.

As we ascended the stairs, I recounted to him briefly all that she had told me. I found, to my chagrin, that they had no tidings, having apparently waited for me. Von Gaden told me that when I did not return, Ramodanofsky came back, after having been out on a search for Homyak, and that they had come together to the house, and found Vladimir, as I had left him, on the floor. The serfs had evidently discovered him before their arrival, and fled

in fear of being accused of murder; for, although the doors of the apartment had been forced open, the body had not been disturbed, and the doctor said that the cups still stood on the table with the untouched dish of caviare. We did not go into the room, for when we reached the large hall, we found Feodor Serghievitch pacing up and down with a gloomy face. What strange thoughts must have been his that night! I noticed at once that he wore the full uniform of the Streltsi, and was completely armed. I presented him to Mademoiselle Eudoxie, and he met her with more kindness than I had imagined him capable of displaying. I saw her looking at his scarred and drawn face with an expression of awe; but she felt, too, his courteous acknowledgment of her care of his daughter. We were all too troubled about Zénarde, however, to think of anything else.

"The city is in a tumult to-night," Von Gaden remarked; "there have been small riots in several quarters, and we cannot move too quickly. Mademoiselle, will you return to my house with me?"

Both Ramodanofsky and I saw her look of horror, and the boyar solved the difficulty.

"If mademoiselle will return to her rooms

here for the present, I shall be grateful," he said. "Two of my men are here, and will stay to guard her, and she can be ready to receive my daughter at any moment."

Mademoiselle knew nothing of the body still lying in the closed room, and decided to remain, being unable to conquer her aversion to Von Gaden's house. As soon as she was safely installed, we separated, each to prosecute the search, Pierrot following me. We were walking away from the house alone when he caught up with me.

"M. le Vicomte," he said in a subdued voice, "begging your pardon, we had better go to your quarters."

"What do you mean, knave?" I exclaimed sharply, stopping short.

"Nothing, my lord," he replied calmly, "except that I think it probable that that Russian devil of M. Ramodanofsky's has roasted the other one by this time."

"You fool!" I cried. "Did you leave Polotsky at Michael's mercy?"

Pierrot's stolidity was never shaken.

"You were in peril, M. le Vicomte," he said doggedly, "and I cared not a rap whether he roasted forty Russians or not, so long as I saved you. The fellow is a vile knave anyway, and

might as well be dead as alive; only I thought your excellency might object to his cooking him at your quarters."

"You rogue!" I cried angrily. "Go at once and protect the wretch until I come; I have not a moment to lose now."

With considerable reluctance he obeyed, walking off slowly, and looking back more than once over his shoulder.

I went on rapidly, turning my face towards the Kremlin. If Homyak had returned from his errand, he would be about the palace, and I was determined to find him.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HOMYAK.

At last, after so much ill luck, fortune favored me. At no great distance from Von Gaden's house, in a lonely street, I saw a small figure dodging along ahead of me. Dark as it was, I was certain of my discovery. There were many court dwarfs, but there was something about Homyak's figure and gait that was unmistakable. He did not know who was behind him, and was off his guard. In a moment I had overtaken him, and had him by the collar; he shrieked and cowered like a frightened animal, but I put my pistol to his head for the second time.

"Be quiet, you rogue!" I said, in a low tone. "If you make any outcry, it will cost you your life."

He recognized my voice at once, and I fancied that he drew a long breath of relief.

"Why do you use me so ill, M. le Vicomte?" he whined. "I was on my way to the Kremlin

on business for her majesty; it is not safe to interfere with me; the czarina — ”

I had turned him about, and was half pushing, half dragging him along.

“ You will come back with me, nevertheless,” I replied calmly, making my way towards Von Gaden’s. “ You can give us some information that we need, and give it you shall.”

He whimpered in the darkness, and writhed in my hands like the miserable ape that he was.

“ I know nothing, M. de Brousson,” he cried feverishly; “ you are wasting time on a poor wretch who cannot fight you.”

I did not reply, but tightened my grip on his collar, remembering Zénaïde, and longing to whip the hound as he deserved. But he was determined not to give up without a protest.

“ Where are you taking me?” he moaned. “ I shall be punished at the palace for my delay. What can your excellency want with so humble a creature?”

I smiled grimly in the darkness; I was not without some enjoyment of the situation.

“ I am taking you to an old acquaintance, Homyak,” I said quietly; “ to the Boyar Feodor Sergheievitch Ramodanofsky.”

Homyak cried out in his agony of alarm,

and almost wrenched himself from my grip. "Have mercy!" he shrieked, with a repetition of Polotsky's abject terror. "Anything but that, M. le Vicomte; do with me as you will, but spare me that. I will tell anything, do anything if you will keep me from him."

I could not help sympathizing with his desire to escape; I could scarcely imagine a more relentless fate than the boyar. However, I saw my advantage, and merely hastened my steps, although I had literally to drag the dwarf by main force, while he begged for mercy. At the door, I found Von Gaden, and together we took the limp prisoner into the study, and there, while he cowered before my pistol, we cross-examined him, Von Gaden annoying me by his eagerness to fathom the dwarf's connection with Ramodanofsky, while I was endeavoring to obtain information about Zénaïde.

"Polotsky has confessed," I said, "and it only remains for you to tell us what you know. Denials will not serve."

"I know nothing," whined the dwarf, reassured by the absence of Ramodanofsky, and resuming his original pretense of ignorance.

"Pshaw, Homyak!" interposed Von Gaden, sternly, "what is the use of lying to me? Do you think I have forgotten the attempted murder

of Feodor Sergheievitch? Do you think you can escape his vengeance? There is no one to protect you. Vladimir has gone to meet the eternal justice."

The dwarf stared at him wildly.

"Vladimir Sergheievitch dead?" he cried; and then a sudden thought brought a gleam to his eyes. "By the hand of Feodor?" he asked.

"By his own act," I retorted gravely; "and we know that you were employed to remove Mademoiselle Zénaïde Feodorovna from this house, and you must take us to the place where she is imprisoned. You were Vladimir's agent."

"Yes," interrupted Von Gaden again, to my annoyance, "just as you were employed fifteen years ago to stab Feodor on the threshold of his home."

"I was not," cried the dwarf, vehemently. "Vladimir Sergheievitch stabbed his brother himself; I only witnessed it."

"It is easy to accuse the dead," retorted Von Gaden, scornfully.

"It is true," protested Homyak, angered and frightened by the physician's mocking manner. "I knew it all, and he feared me,—feared I would betray him to the Czar Alexis."

"Yet you were guilty, Homyak," said the

other, calmly; "it was you who stripped the dead body of the prisoner and put the clothes on Feodor, while he was yet unconscious."

The dwarf cowered, watching his interlocutor as if under a spell.

"I never put the clothes on the boyar," he exclaimed. "I did strip the corpse in the prison and helped Polotsky to throw it in the Yauza, but they dressed Feodor Sergheievitch in the clothes and put him in the cell themselves; he was about the size of the dead felon, and it did n't cost much to make the guards think he was the same. I did nothing then."

"You have admitted a good deal," said Von Gaden, with a laugh; "the boyar may have another opinion about your innocence."

Homyak collapsed in his chair, suddenly awakened to the trap into which the Jew had skillfully led him. I was beside myself with impatience.

"Come, Homyak," I said impatiently, "where is Mademoiselle Zénaïde?"

"I do not know," he reiterated sullenly.

I looked at the clock and ran my finger down the barrel of my pistol.

"The Boyar Ramodanofsky will be here in a quarter of an hour," I said quietly, "and you

can take your choice between answering him and leading me to the place."

It seemed to me that the dwarf's pale face turned green as he stared at us. It was the last straw, and he surrendered quickly enough.

"Zénaïde Feodorovna is safe," he protested; "she is in a house across the Moskva, in the Biélui-gorod. I will take you there instantly, M. le Vicomte; I will do anything if you will but save me from that man's hands."

"Prepare yourself, then," I said at once; "we will go without delay to the house, and woe to you if you have deceived me — in the smallest particular — for your life shall answer for Mademoiselle's safety."

Von Gaden had been called out of the room while I spoke, and returned now with a grave face. I was making ready for instant departure.

"You will have to go out by the secret stair, M. le Vicomte," he said to me in French; "the Streltsi have risen, and there is a mob in the street. I hear them calling for me."

While he was speaking, I heard a loud noise at the street door; in our excitement we had not noticed the sounds without, which might have warned us. We stood listening now, taken by surprise, and could hear the shouting

of a mob and the crash of stones against the door.

"Where is your wife?" I asked at once.

"Fortunately not here to-night, but with a friend," he replied quietly.

Looking suddenly at Homyak, I saw a gleam of demoniac triumph on his white face; it roused me to immediate action.

"We have not a moment to lose," I said to Von Gaden; "we must get out by the secret staircase, and take this knave with us, or all will be lost."

The servants were crowding into the room, shaking with fear, to tell us that a mob was beating in the door.

"They will not harm you, you fools!" Von Gaden said. "They want me; they think me a poisoner, a magician, a devil." He spoke with a passionate scorn, realizing how bitter was the requital for all his skill and devotion. - "You can save yourselves easily," he added, looking at the trembling menials, "by throwing open the door and delivering me into their hands."

Meanwhile the tumult without increased, and we could hear the door creak under the shower of heavy blows; it was only a question of a few minutes before they would be upon us. I

seized Homyak by the collar and touched Von Gaden's sleeve; he started as if suddenly roused, and awakened to the importance of haste.

"We must be off, Dr. von Gaden," I said.
"The door will not hold many minutes more."

He told the servants to return to their quarters, where they would be safe, as soon as the mob found that he had gone. Then we went up the stairs, he leading and I following with Homyak, who came submissively enough, hoping, probably, that we should not be able to escape. There had been a momentary lull without, but I knew that the quiet boded ill. We had barely reached the top of the stairs when there was a tremendous crash, and the outer door fell, and with a roar of triumphant rage the rioters poured in. Von Gaden extinguished his light, and in the dark we rushed along the passage, and getting into the rooms formerly occupied by Zénaïde, secured the doors. We could hear the mob shrieking and crashing through the lower part of the house, and we had not a moment to spare. The doctor had procured another light, and I held it, while he unfastened the panel and listened a moment, to assure himself that the secret passage was not discovered. A blow on the room door ended

his hesitation; signing to me to enter first, he secured the panel on the inner side just as we heard the other door give way. Would they discover the panel? We had no time to think, but dashed down the stairs, almost dragging Homyak, who either could not or would not keep pace with us. When we reached the cellar, we were confronted with the possibility that the house was surrounded, and the lane cut off. All was quiet behind us; evidently they had not discovered the stair, and we paused to draw breath. Then Von Gaden put out the light, and cautiously unfastening the trap-door, peeped out. The fresh air struck my face with a strangely reviving power. It was still; only distant sounds came from the house above us. Von Gaden raised the trap and called to me to come.

"All is well here," he said quietly, a tone of relief in his voice.

Approaching with Homyak, I stood beside him and looked out. The first gray light of the morning of the twenty-fifth of May was shining upon the stone walls and the deserted lane. It was as quiet and lonely as the most peaceful spot in the world, but the coming light troubled me not a little.

"Where will you go?" I said to Von Gaden

in French. "You cannot accompany us in broad daylight; it would be certain death to you."

"Ay, and ruin to your project, M. le Vicomte," he replied calmly. "I know of a temporary refuge near at hand. You must go on at once, and may success attend you."

"I cannot bear to leave you in this extremity," I rejoined, hesitatingly.

"Delay is fatal," he replied quietly; "this is the beginning of the end. Sophia has let loose the fiends, and who will chain them up again? Zénaïde Feodorovna is in danger from them also; therefore farewell, M. de Brousson, and may your patron saint befriend you."

We were standing in the lane, and he pressed my hand; his face was sad, it may have been with a prescience of impending fate. His warning had taken effect, however, and my thoughts were all for Zénaïde's safety; and so I parted from him and hurried on with the reluctant dwarf, who saw that his chances of evading me grew momentarily less. Once I looked back and saw the Jew disappearing into the low door of a pine hovel at the end of the lane, — one of those huts occupied by peasants, and built in two days, at the cost of a few rubles, and at that time scattered through Moss-

cow, beside the palaces of the nobles, in every quarter of the town. After this, I turned my face steadily towards the river and hurried on, guided by Homyak, who seemed to grow more resigned to the inevitable as he realized my relentless determination. I had selected a way that I knew was not likely to be crossed by the rioters, and our progress was uninterrupted. This part of the city seemed quiet enough as yet, undisturbed as it was by the tumult stirring in the quarters of the Streltsi. Yet there was a portentous aspect even about these silent houses; occasionally a face would appear at a window, to be withdrawn as quickly at our approach, and once or twice I heard the heavy bolts drawn across a door as our footsteps sounded in the silent street. There was terror here, concealed in these quiet corners; the specter of some danger already lurked in these lonely alleys. The gray of dawn had passed into the broad daylight, but there were no signs of the busy life of a city waking up; it seemed as if the active element must have been drawn off to another quarter, and there was only desolation here. How still it was! We were in the Biélui-gorod now, walking in the direction of the Smolensk Gate, and suddenly we were startled by a strange sound, the galloping hoofs

of a horse and a man's hoarse voice shouting something, the same words repeated again and again. I stopped involuntarily to listen, and in a moment he crossed the end of the street, riding recklessly, and swinging his long arms over his head. It was one of the Streltsi, and his uniform was splashed with mud and his long hair was flying. He saw us but did not pause, only calling out his constant cry:—

“The Naryshkins have murdered the Czarevitch Ivan! To arms! To the Kremlin and punish the traitors! Rescue the czar!”

And with this he dashed on, repeating his alarm as he went. Could it be true? It was not probable that the blind czarevitch had been injured; but, in any case, I had no time for reflection, but hastened on, knowing that this must be a preconcerted signal, and anticipating the worst. My fears were soon justified by another more ominous sign. The silence of the quiet city was once again broken, and now by a tremendous wave of sound, a deep, warlike note; the tocsin in four hundred churches called the Streltsi to arms. On every side, the loud, full notes smote the air and awoke a tremendous echo, and in the intervals, far off I heard the roll of drums. Still, the streets about me remained deserted; the rioters were not here.

I had released my hold on Homyak, because I did not wish to attract the notice even of the occasional watcher at a window; but he walked in front of me, knowing that I carried my pistol, ready to send him to his last account if he made an attempt to escape. It struck me now that he was walking slowly, and I mended my pace. "More haste, Homyak," I remarked grimly; "every moment lost increases your risk of falling into Ramodanofsky's hands."

"It is but a little way now, M. le Vicomte," he said sullenly; "yonder is the house."

I looked eagerly in the direction he indicated, and saw a plain-looking building that might be the home of one of the middle class, and it was closed in a gloomy fashion. Running my eye over the portions that faced us, I could not see a sign of occupation. It occurred to me that the dwarf might be leading me into a trap, and I laid my hand again on his collar, at the same time pushing on to the door.

"If you have duped me," I said sternly, "it will cost you your life, if the odds are twenty to one."

"I have not duped you, master," he replied earnestly. "M. Ramodanofsky's daughter was there, and must be there still."

We had reached the door, and he tapped on it three times in a peculiar manner; and after a little it was opened by a plain-looking woman, who gazed at me curiously, but stood aside to admit us, as if Homyak's presence was a sufficient guarantee.

"Take this gentleman to Zénaïde Feodorovna's apartments," the dwarf said to her; and without a word she led the way, and we followed to the rear of the house and up a flight of steps; and here, at an open door, they both stood aside, and I tapped gently before entering, my anxiety swept away by the anticipation of seeing Zénaïde. A large vacant room met my eyes, sparsely furnished, and with a door leading into another apartment. I paused, hesitating to intrude farther. I looked back, and the woman stood in the other door, watching me curiously.

"Go in and tell mademoiselle that M. de Brousson is here," I said.

She only stared at me for a moment, and then I repeated my order sharply.

"I thought you knew that she was not here now," she said stupidly.

"Not here?" I rushed into the inner room, only to find it empty; but on the floor lay a woman's glove, a glove like the one dropped by

Zénaïde in the Kremlin long ago. In an instant I divined the truth.

"Where is that rogue?" I exclaimed as I came out.

"He has gone, master," she answered stolidly; "he went down the stairs as soon as you turned your back, and out at the door."

I saw that she at least spoke the truth, and ran to the outer door; but there was no sign of the dwarf, — he had escaped. I came back, determined to learn the truth from the woman, who, I saw, was a dull tool, little schooled in evasion.

"When did the young lady leave here?" I asked her sharply.

"About an hour ago, perhaps," she replied, simply enough, "and much against her will; she would rather have stayed with me."

"Who was with her?" I asked, a horror possessing me.

"A tall man, master," she said slowly. "I did not know him, but he gave the signal and he had the boyar's signet, — a man with an ill-favored face, and one eye turned in towards the nose, and very long teeth."

There was no difficulty in recognizing the description; it was Viatscheslav.

"Did he say where he was going?" I asked, curbing my excitement.

"To the Kremlin," she replied promptly, "and they have scarcely been gone an hour."

Without waiting for another word, I dashed out and turned my steps towards the Kremlin, frenzied with anxiety.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE RED STAIRCASE.

HAVING had no sleep and scarcely any food for many hours, I was worn out; yet so intense was the mental strain that the physical weakness was little heeded. I had but one thought,—to reach the Kremlin in time to intercede with Sophia for Zénaïde. In the midst of the present trouble, I did not believe that Natalia would oppose the czarevna's wishes, especially since the death of the Boyar Vladimir Sergheievitch made his niece less important. Her marriage with Naryshkin could no longer insure the loyalty of one of the older nobles. On the other hand, Vladimir's death and Feodor's return would have weight with Sophia, on account of Galitsyn's friendship for the elder boyar. I had no time for reflection, however, as I dashed along at the top of my speed, no longer noticing the deserted streets, and scarcely conscious of the increasing volume of sound that rolled towards me as I approached

the Kremlin. The confused roar of a vast multitude, and now and then the roll of a drum or the crash of firearms, filled my ears. Still I heeded them not, but rushing on, reached the outskirts of the crowd that was gathering in every avenue to the five gates of the fortress. I pushed my way amidst the angry, threatening mob, indifferent to the outcry and tumult; but as I approached the Gate of Saint Nicholas of Mojaïsk, it became almost impossible to advance; the entrance was packed, and looking over the heads of those immediately in front, I could see a solid mass of humanity beyond. It was not difficult to understand the meaning of the demonstration; it was the bursting of the tempest which had been gathering for so many weeks. Before me was the banner of the Streltsi with the face of the Virgin on its broad folds, and one of the regimental cannon had been dragged half through the gate. Stepping upon a projecting ledge of masonry, I caught a glimpse of the scene within, and comprehended the situation. The boyars had been taken by surprise, and their enemies were in possession of the Kremlin; the gates that, once closed, might have been defended were in the hands of the Streltsi. Here and there, in the crowd, I saw the carriage of a boyar forced back from

the gate; the rioters had unharnessed all the horses, killing some of them,—an action that demonstrated a desperate determination on their part to cage the nobility within the walls. The most conspicuous weapons carried by the Streltsi were their long handled spears, and I noticed at once that they had severed the unwieldy handles in the middle, thus making them far more available and deadly. There was a confused roar from the crowd, broken now and then by the shout: “They have murdered the Czarevitch Ivan, they have slain the royal family! Give us the traitors!” A seething mass of savage faces and gleaming spears.

Where was Zénaïde? The thought of her drove every consideration of prudence from my mind. I drew my sword, and leaping into the mob, joined it in the rush towards the Red Place. I knew that if she was in the Kremlin she was probably with the czarina, for Naryshkin would seek his own safety in the palace. I soon found that I was really only on the margin of the throng, for as we approached the Red Staircase, the crush became fearful, and here the rioters had leaped all bounds of control. They were crowding forward, howling like demons; on every side the shouts for the Czarevitch Ivan and vengeance on the Naryshkins were deafen-

ing. The Czarevna Sophia had been playing on the credulity of the populace, and this mob was possessed with the idea that the Naryshkins were aiming at the crown, in spite of the fact that the young czar was of their own blood. Pushed and beaten about, I had no control over my movements, and was hurled along into the Red Place, where, at last, we came to a standstill, for here the main body of the insurgents was packed about the Red Staircase, where the ringleaders had been parleying with deputies from the palace. When I found myself in a position where I could look about me, a curious spectacle met my gaze. I was near the center of the Red Place, and could not at first hear much of what was passing, but could see the scene in front of the palace. In the square the rioters were, for the moment, quiet, and every eye was fixed on the group on the balcony. The Princes Galitsyn, Tcherkasky, Havansky, and Sheremétief were there with the patriarch, evidently endeavoring by pacific addresses to quiet the mob. In the foreground stood the Czarina Natalia, holding by either hand the Czar Peter and the Czarevitch Ivan. Even at a distance, I could see her deep agitation; her face was as white as marble, and she held the two boys close to her. The contrast between

the young princes was more marked than ever; Ivan cowered beside his step-mother, manifestly terrified at the crisis, while the young czar stood undaunted, his bold, dark eye sweeping over the crowd with an imperious glance. No doubt the recollections of that day's pain and humiliation increased the horrors of the vengeance that he wreaked upon the Streltsi in later years.

I learned afterwards that, by the advice of Matveief, the czarina had brought out the two children to satisfy the rioters of their safety. The sight of them at that distance did not content the mob; and after a moment's quiet, they made a rush for the palace, and, by means of ladders, some of them clambered up to the balcony, pushing aside the patriarch, who tried to interpose his person between them and the imperial family. It was a moment of great excitement, and the czarina's nerve failed. I saw her give one look at the advancing mob; and then, taking the two princes, she hurriedly withdrew, her retreat precipitating a scene of terror. The rioters had swarmed up the Red Staircase, and although, as yet, but little violence had marked the outbreak, it was only a question of time; unless something quelled the tumult, nothing could save the palace. I had been too closely hemmed in to move; but this new rush gave me

an opportunity to advance, and I pushed on, determined to reach the Czarevna Sophia. But the forward movement was halted by the sudden appearance of Matveief upon the Red Staircase. The ex-chancellor had once been one of the most popular commanders of the Streltsi, and his appearance had an immediate effect. He was a man not only of great personal dignity, but of diplomatic address, and the moment he began to speak, the rioters quieted down. He appealed to them eloquently to be true to their reputation as loyal soldiers of the czar, assuring them of the safety of the imperial family and of the absolute fealty of the Naryshkins, and denouncing the rumors which had poisoned their minds as absolutely without foundation. I could not hear all his speech, but could divine much from his tones and gestures, and saw at once that he had grasped the situation, and was handling it with a dexterity worthy of the politician that he was. It was just at the time when a pebble could turn the scale, and it seemed as if he had won the day. The conclusion of his speech was greeted with thundering applause, and for the moment the whole aspect of affairs was changed. The rioters began to talk among themselves, their weapons were less in evidence, and, apparently,

the crisis had come and passed. But the next instant I saw that a new danger threatened. Prince Michael Dolgoruky, second in command of the Department of the Streltsi, appeared on the Red Staircase, and even before he spoke, the humor of the mob changed. The prince was pompous, arrogant, and especially ill fitted to cope with the situation. He gave evidence of his incompetence at once, by ordering the rioters to disperse, in the tones of a master rebuking them for their insolence, and, by speech and gesture, provoking a storm of indignation that burst on his devoted head. He had scarcely ceased speaking when, with a yell of fury, they rushed up the Red Staircase once more, and seizing him by his long robes, dragged him down the stairs.

The rabble had gone mad, and I saw that the worst had come. The prince was hurled to the ground and surrounded by a howling mob; a moment later, his mutilated body was trodden under foot as the rioters rushed on into the palace. I hoped to be carried in with them, but another pause checked us, and then I saw the cause of it. The ringleaders had found Matveief and were dragging the white-haired chancellor out to the head of the stairs. He who a moment before had enjoyed their confi-

dence, was to test the fickle passion of the populace. The howls about me were demoniacal, and nothing now could curb the fury that the unhappy Dolgoruky had let loose. Protest-
ing and struggling, Matveief was pushed to the top of the Red Staircase and thrown down upon the spears of the rioters below. I looked aside; I had served in many a battle under the Lilies of France, but this brutal murder and mutilation of an old man sickened me. The rabble had tasted blood, and the scene that followed was hideous beyond description. Their fury was directed against the Naryshkin party and the boyars. As they began the work of slaughter, they broke up into small parties, searching for their prey, and there was more space in the square, the crowd, though dense and furious, being less packed. "Down with the Naryshkins! Give us the traitors!" they howled, and I found that they were determined to compel the czarina to surrender her brothers, Ivan and Athanasius Naryshkin, to share the fate of her guardian Matveief.

For the first time, somewhat released by the throng, I was pushing my way towards the Red Staircase, when a cry rose to my right: "Here is a Naryshkin! Death to the villain!" Springing aside to escape the rush, I looked in

that direction, and saw that the rioters were swarming about a carriage which I had previously observed hemmed in by the crowd. The horses had been killed, and the occupants, if there were any, were at the mercy of the mob. An impulse prompted me to push forward for a nearer view, and the next moment, I dashed among the insurgents with such impetuosity, that they gave way and let me reach the carriage, partly because their fury was centered on the man, whom they had dragged out by the hair and were beating to death. I had seen his face before a blow obliterated the features in blood; it was Viatscheslav. I knocked down the rioter who was at the door of the coach, and springing into it, gazed eagerly at the figure which was shrinking in the corner. It was Zénaïde Feodorovna.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN THE FACE OF DEATH.

AT the first moment she did not know me, but shrank away from a supposed rioter, her white face sharply outlined against the dark background.

“At last I have found you,” I exclaimed, almost with joy, in spite of our peril.

She recognized my voice, and clung to my hand like a child.

“Save me!” she cried faintly; “they will tear me to pieces, as they are tearing him.”

“I will save you,” I murmured in a low tone; “only trust me and be brave.”

I flung her mantle over her head, veiling her face, and opening the other door of the carriage, sprang boldly out, lifting her to the ground. The rioters were still busy dispatching Viatscheslav, who was not quite dead, and they let us take two or three steps unmolested, then, with a howl, surrounded us. Zénaïde

shrank towards me, quivering in every limb; I threw my left arm around her, and in the other hand I held my naked sword.

"Here is some of the Naryshkin brood!" was the cry. "Cut them down, there is no room here for traitors!"

"Stand back!" I exclaimed in a loud tone, and the habit of command served me well, for there was a pause. "Give place here for the lady; she is a ward of the Czarevna Sophia. Woe unto you if you harm a Miloslavsky!"

"He lies!" exclaimed one of them, mockingly; "this woman was with Naryshkin. Who is this traitor? One of their minions?"

There was a howl of fury from the outer edge of the crowd, but I kept the foremost back by my undaunted front.

"I am the envoy of the King of France," I said calmly, "and if a hair of my head is injured, Russia will have to answer for it. Stand aside! I must take this lady to the czarevna."

A mob is like a wild beast, curbed by the steadiest nerve, and I saw that I might hold these furies at bay just as long as I kept my head. Zénaïde was bravely silent, but I felt her shiver as she leaned against me. The worst aspect of it was that the throng was becoming larger, and at any moment might be

beyond my control; one of the ringleaders too was disposed to have my blood.

"How do we know that the fellow is speaking the truth?" he exclaimed. "Who knows that he is the envoy of the King of France?"

"He looks a squire of dames," a voice cried in the crowd, and there was a shout of derision.

Another second, and I could not control them. I ran my eye despairingly along the ring of ferocious faces. Suddenly I saw the head of Michael, Ramodanofsky's man, craned over the others. I hailed the sight with joy.

"There is one of your own men who knows me," I exclaimed, pointing at him.

He evidently divined the situation, if he did not recognize Zénaïde, and pushed forward, whispering something to the ringleaders that damped their impetuosity. But, even then, we were in great peril, until a sudden diversion released us.

"There goes Peter Naryshkin!" rose a shriek to the left, and the ring around us dissolved, and they were off, full cry, after the unfortunate, whom they brutally murdered, although he proved to be not a Naryshkin, but the son of a boyar, Feodor Soltykof.

At the moment of the break, I hurried Zénaïde away. The rioters had occupied the

Red Staircase and were swarming into the palace, so that it was impossible to gain access there, and it was necessary to hide her at once from the sight of the mob. The only refuge that occurred to me was one of the cathedrals, and with a common impulse, we hastened in the direction of the Church of the Resurrection. On every side the work of death was going on, and the ground was slippery with blood. I turned out of my path that Zénaïde might not see a hideous corpse which I recognized, by the dress alone, as that of the Chancellor Matveief. She displayed unusual courage, walking with a firm step amid scenes of such horror that they sickened me — a man and a soldier. I had hoped that Michael might join us, but he had been pushed away by the furious pursuit of Peter Naryshkin, and I had to depend on my own sword and my own wits to bring her safe through. Pushed hither and thither by the surging crowd, we finally reached the rear of the cathedral. Here it was comparatively quiet, and I paused to look about for a way to enter without going to the front, that we might escape the rioters.

"There is a postern to the left," Zénarde said, rousing herself, and speaking in a quiet voice.

She guided me along the wall until we came to a low door, and here she knocked gently. They were probably watching for fugitives, for it was opened almost at once by a white-haired priest, who let us in silently and barred the door behind us. But even as we entered, there was a sound of a fierce tumult from the front of the building which arrested our movements.

“What is it?” cried Zénaïde, her voice breaking a little with terror, for it was like the roar of wild beasts. The priest stood listening, his face pale.

“Alas!” he exclaimed, as we heard the outer doors crash in, “some one must have betrayed him. Athanasius Naryshkin is hidden under the altar. If they find him, nothing can save him.”

He rushed towards the curtained alcove behind the altar, through which he could enter the chancel, and leaving Zénaïde for a moment, I followed him. It was too late to do anything to rescue Naryshkin; not even the priests could save him by appealing to the sanctity of the house of God. It was a horrid scene; the outer doors had been forced, and the church was crowded with a frantic mob. The light in the cathedral was dim, but those terrible blood-stained faces stood out against the gloomy

background with awful distinctness, and the blood dripped from their spears upon the floor. On the altar steps stood a figure which I recognized with righteous indignation, and regret that I had not slain him. It was the diminutive apelike form of Homyak, and it was he who had directed the movements of the searching party, his the first yell of triumph as they dragged the czarina's unfortunate brother from under the altar. The sight of the defenseless man in the hands of these wretches fired my blood, and I sprang forward; but a young priest caught me in his arms and pressed me back towards the alcove.

"Fool!" he whispered in my ear; "there are eight hundred men in the nave, you cannot save him. It is death to go down the steps."

I realized that he had rescued me, but it frenzied me to hear Naryshkin's death-cry. Already a dozen spears had been struck into his quivering flesh, and he writhed, dying, on the floor of the cathedral. The thought of Zénaréde recalled me to my senses, and I hurried back to her.

"Come," I said, "the church is in the hands of the mob, and we cannot hide here."

I unfastened the door, and we emerged upon a quiet scene, for the rioters were all at the front of the building or within it. While I hesi-

tated upon my next step, Zénaïde came nearer to me and grasped my sleeve.

“M. le Vicomte,” she said, “have you seen Mademoiselle Eudoxie? Do you know where she is?”

I started; I had entirely forgotten the good woman.

“She is in the Ramodanofsky house,” I replied; I had been on the point of saying “your father’s house,” but recollect ed in time not to shock her with the sudden revelation.

“Holy Virgin!” she cried, “they are murdering the boyars; they will go there and kill her. We must save her.”

The truth of what she said had already dawned upon me, but I could not help made-moiselle while Zénaïde was in such peril.

“As soon as you are safe,” I said, “I will go and protect Mademoiselle Eudoxie.”

But she was animated by the spirit of her race, and her womanly fears had subsided at the thought of another’s danger.

“I will go now, M. de Brousson,” she exclaimed, her eyes shining with a determined fire. “We can get out; the crowd has been drawn away from yonder gate. We cannot go back. Hear them howl about the palace! What is it that they are shouting now?”

I bent my head and listened. Distinctly I heard Von Gaden's name coupled with cries of "traitor" and "poison."

"They want the physician's life," Zénaïde said; "I heard them, before you came, crying for him, saying that he had murdered the Czar Feodor. But come, M. le Vicomte, we have not a moment to lose."

"Mademoiselle," I cried in a fever of anxiety, "you cannot go, you must not go! It is dangerous — perhaps certain death —"

She stopped, and turned to look at me; her mantle had fallen back so that I could see plainly the pale, beautiful face, the brilliant light in the blue eyes.

"M. de Brousson," she said, in a low tone, "I am wrong to imperil your life. Leave me; I must go and save her, but it is too much to ask of you."

"Mademoiselle," I remonstrated, "do not imagine that I would fail to do my duty because of any personal risk. If I have ever served you, forbear such a taunt as that."

"Pardon me," she murmured faintly; "I spoke in haste, but —"

I had drawn her arm through mine.

"Come, mademoiselle," I said, and hurried her on, without another word, towards the gate

nearest us, all the while listening to the yells of rage and triumph behind. They were dragging the hideously mutilated bodies of their victims, Matveief, the Naryshkins, and many more, across the square with the spears still sticking in them, and I could hear the cries: "Here goes the Boyar Artemon Sergheievitch Matveief!" "Here goes a privy-councillor!" Zénaïde heard and understood, for she shuddered; but nothing stayed our course. Every moment was precious, and we moved along as rapidly as we dared. To run would have been a fatal way of attracting attention, for even here there were groups of rioters apparently searching for victims; and as we neared the gate, a howl to the left made us both turn, only to see them strike down a white-haired councillor. If I had been without Zénaïde, the old man would not have fallen without a blow in his defense; but her helplessness tied my hands, although my blood boiled at the sight. The rabble was frenzied with the taste of slaughter, and burning with the thirst for vengeance for many bitter wrongs. Never, for a moment, did I doubt the justice of most of the complaints of the Streltsi. They had suffered, in common with all of the lower classes of Russia, and now that they could strike a blow in revenge, it was

very sweet to them. The murder of the aged official was fortunate for us, drawing all attention to that spot, and so permitting us to escape. Once out of the Kremlin, we breathed more freely. At that time the riot was confined within the walls of the fortress, and the streets were comparatively quiet; it was not for some hours that they broke loose, pursuing their enemies into the city, and even searching the houses of the foreigners. The quiet which seemed to prevail without encouraged the hope that we might reach Ramodanofsky's house and get Mademoiselle Eudoxie away unmolested. We had been walking very fast, and I noticed that Zénaïde looked exhausted, and slackened my pace.

"Not so fast, mademoiselle," I said; "it is not now so imperative, and I do not believe that Mademoiselle Eudoxie is in peril as yet. We shall be there in good time."

"I cannot bear to linger a moment, M. le Vicomte," she replied, in a tone of anxiety; "I have seen too much of horror to risk poor mademoiselle; and besides my uncle —"

She paused, as if unwilling to finish the sentence, and I was almost startled; I had forgotten that she did not know of Vladimir's death, and I saw that I must prepare her for the com-

ing revelation, for the Boyar Feodor might be in his own house, although I doubted it.

"Your uncle will never trouble you again, mademoiselle," I remarked quietly.

She started and stared at me with a sudden revulsion of feeling; I knew that she fancied him among the mutilated bodies in the Kremlin.

"Did you see it?" she exclaimed faintly.

"You misunderstand, mademoiselle," I replied; "he was not murdered yonder. He died — by — by accident in his own house yesterday. I witnessed the end. There was none of the violence you feared."

She looked at me wonderingly, evidently unable to grasp the change that had taken place so suddenly: her uncle and her detested betrothed both removed so swiftly from her path.

"You witnessed his death, M. de Brousson?" she said slowly; "I do not understand."

Then I told her, as gently as I could, of my search for her, and the visit to Ramodanofsky, and of the fatal cup of *vodka*.

"Yes," she said quietly, "I knew that he kept deadly poisons — eastern poisons — in that cabinet. It is strange how swiftly come the retributions. And the mirror which saved you, I love it so well. It was my mother's; she

brought it with her from France. How little she dreamed that it would save a Frenchman's life!"

And avenge her, I thought, wondering not a little how much Zénaïde recollects of the tragedy of the past.

"Mademoiselle," I said gently, "can you recall your childhood? Do you remember your mother—or your father?"

"I cannot tell," she replied thoughtfully; "my mind is confused about it. I cannot separate what I may remember from what the old servants may have told me. I was so young when my mother died, I could not remember, of course, and I was not so much older at my father's death."

"At your father's death," I repeated slowly; "is your father really dead, then?"

She glanced at me in wide-eyed amazement. "Did you not know it, monsieur?"

"I knew that your uncle said that he was dead," I replied quietly, watching her agitated face.

She stood still, gazing at me strangely.

"Tell me all, M. le Vicomte!" she exclaimed, her breath coming quickly; "you know something—what is it?"

"Mademoiselle," I replied gently, "you

know what the Boyar Vladimir was; can you not imagine that he would easily wrong even his own brother?"

Her face was very pale. "Yes," she returned slowly; "but I never dreamed that he had wronged my father. Did — did he have anything to do with his death?"

I took both her hands in mine.

"Zénaïde Feodorovna," I said tenderly, "your father is not dead; he lives, and is in Moscow."

I had feared that she might faint, but I had forgotten that to her "father" was but a name. She was deeply moved, but she commanded herself, and in a few moments was walking on beside me.

"Where is he now?" she asked after a while, her voice shaken with a new and deep emotion.

"He was at his own home, mademoiselle," I replied; "but now I cannot tell, except that he must be safe, for he is of the Miloslavsky party, and has great influence, I believe, with the Streltsi."

Zénaïde did not reply; I think that it flashed upon her that if the brothers were cast in similar mold, her father might be engaged in the bloody work at the Kremlin, — a thought that had occurred to me since I had seen Michael in

the mob. We walked on in silence, approaching the house at last without having met one of the rioters. To my surprise, the gates were open, and we entered the empty court. It occurred to us both that this silence and desertion was strange; and Zénaïde, running on ahead of me, tried the great doors, and finding them fastened, we passed around to the postern in the wing.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LOVE AND FIRE.

THE postern was also fastened, and Zénaïde knocked repeatedly without effect.

"The house is deserted," she said, turning a frightened look upon me; "where can mademoiselle be? What has happened?"

I was puzzled myself, and at loss to answer her.

"There must be some way to get in," I said, examining the windows.

One to the right of the door was not securely shuttered, and I got it open with but little difficulty, and climbed in. I found the postern securely barred, and opening it, admitted Zénaïde. Together we went up the stairs to mademoiselle's room, only to find it vacant. The whole house seemed as silent as the grave. Hurriedly we searched the place, opening door after door, only to discover silence and solitude. Not a sound greeted our ears, not a sign remained of habitation other than the furniture,

already lightly coated with the dust which had been gathering since the night of Zénaïde's flight. Going into the main building, our search was equally fruitless; descending to the kitchen and even the cellar, we found no trace of either mademoiselle or the boyar. Yet there was no indication of violence, the house had not been attacked; it was as quiet and undisturbed as it was desolate. We had scarcely spoken to each other; but now, as we returned a second time to mademoiselle's room, Zénaïde broke the silence.

"I cannot understand it," she said thoughtfully; "there was no safer place for mademoiselle, and it could not be that she went out on such a day, for they must have known of the riot here before the mob reached the Kremlin."

"She must be safe," I replied reassuringly; "this house has not been disturbed, and she must have left it voluntarily."

"I do not think she can have gone to seek me; mademoiselle is far too timid," she said musingly. "I have brought you on a fool's errand, M. le Vicomte; but, at least, we are out of danger."

"Mademoiselle, you are unkind," I retorted quickly, thinking of her rebuke to my caution in the Kremlin.

She started, and the blood rushed over her fair face.

"I beg a thousand pardons, M. le Vicomte," she faltered. "I never intended an attack upon your courage; I owe it far too much. I can never thank you enough for my deliverance."

"It came from higher hands than mine, mademoiselle," I replied gravely, watching the color flushing her downcast face. "Vengeance was taken out of the reach of my sword, and now you will be safe in a father's care."

I added this to note the effect, and saw anxiety cloud her expression. This unknown father was another source of perplexity. We were both absorbed in our own thoughts and emotions, and had not heeded the sounds which must have been approaching, for we were now startled by the roar of a mob. I sprang to the window and looked out, at first seeing nothing; but the noise was only too near, the rabble was evidently in the street in front and in the lane behind the house, for, on every side, rose the shouts and screams of the angry populace.

"What can have brought them this way?" Zénaïde cried, coming to the window; but I pulled her back out of sight, for I had seen the foremost of the rioters crowding into the court. Without a word, I ran down and saw that the

postern and lower windows were secure, and then returned. Zénaïde was standing out of sight, but where she could look from the window upon the court, which was filling fast.

"What can they want?" she whispered, as if afraid that they would hear her voice.

I thought I knew, remembering that Vladimir's death was not known, nor Feodor's identity. I knew that the dead boyar had been bitterly hated by the lower classes, that he had been intimate with one or more of the colonels of the Streltsi who had been scourged. He had been identified with the Naryshkins, and this, with the fact that he was a perfect type of the arrogant boyar, was enough to excite the fury of the mob, whose taste for blood had only been excited, and not slaked, by the carnival of murder at the Kremlin. What evil fate had induced me to linger a moment in this house? I saw my folly too late, and looked at Zénaïde with the keenest apprehension and self-reproach. How could I save her? I was reflecting upon some means of rescuing her. They had already begun to clamor for admittance, and no door could resist them long. I must find some way to delay their entrance, to give the Boyar Ramodanof-sky time to come to our relief, for I felt sure

that he had some influence with the rioters. The house was completely surrounded, and I could think of no way of getting Zénaïde out with any chance of escape. Meanwhile, I heard the resounding blows upon the main entrance replied to with similar ones on the postern and the kitchen door. No time could be lost.

"Stay here, mademoiselle," I said; "I must speak to those in front, and so draw off the *canaille* from the other entrances."

"You are mad, M. le Vicomte," she exclaimed; "your presence will merely excite the mob. If we must die, let it be by our own hands; I cannot fall into theirs alive."

She stood in the center of the room, her face white and composed, and her blue eyes gleaming with the fire of her race. I saw that, in the extremity, she would meet death with the resolution of a soldier's daughter. I had never loved her more than at that moment, when I saw her stand there, facing death, and a peril worse than death, with the unfaltering courage of a noble soul. I took her hand in mine and kissed it.

"Mademoiselle," I said in a low voice, "I swear to you that you shall not fall into their hands alive."

She did not withdraw her hand, and her blue eyes looked steadily into mine.

"I thank you from my heart," she said firmly; "I can die cheerfully, as becomes a Ramodanofsky."

Below, the blows upon the door seemed to shake the house itself. I left her and went to the window over the door; opening the shutters, I leaped upon the sill. In a moment some one saw me, and there was a yell, followed by a hoarse roar from the mob gathering, as I had anticipated, beneath the window to watch me. It was a large party of rioters; the courtyard was crowded, and they overflowed into the street. The foremost of the party had just secured a heavy beam, and were preparing to use it as a battering-ram against the door beneath; but at the sight of me overhead, they paused to stare and listen. There were some of the Streltsi as ringleaders, but a large portion was the off-scouring of the city, ripe for mischief and rapine; armed with spears and hatchets and clubs, their faces perfect types of low ferocity; arrested in their attack only for the moment, and furious at the delay. It was a sight to freeze a man's blood to face it alone, and with the thought of the young girl behind me, it drove me mad. A lamb at the mercy of

hyenas! Before I could speak, they began to shout to me to come down and unfasten the door.

"We have come to see the Boyar Vladimir Sergheievitch Ramodanofsky!" they cried mockingly; "and if we are not presently made welcome, he will find our greeting warm."

I made a gesture to them to listen, and there was a momentary pause, more dreadful perhaps than their cries, and I could see their savage faces and their bloody hands.

"The Boyar Vladimir Sergheievitch is dead," I said, in a loud voice; "he died by his own hand yesterday, and there is no one here."

A howl of baffled fury and derision greeted my announcement; I saw that they did not believe me.

"Open the door, good fellow!" shrieked a leader, derisively, "so that we can attend the funeral. The boyar loved the people; let the people have his body."

"I swear to you that the boyar is dead," I shouted, "and his body is not here. I know not where they have taken it."

"We will find it! We will find it!" they howled, and I saw that I was no longer holding them, but that some were breaking away and running to either side of the house. Only the

group in front remained, staring at me and mocking me with hideous grimaces, made more horrid by the smears of blood upon their grimy faces.

"Why do you listen to him?" shouted a voice on the outskirts. "This is the same fellow who took the woman out of Naryshkin's carriage."

"Ramodanofsky's niece!" they screamed, with sudden inspiration; "she was betrothed to that devil Viatscheslav! The fellow has her here!"

That brought them howling under the window.

"Open the door!" they cried to me, "or we will tear you limb from limb when we get in! No more lies for us! We will have them all!"

I shouted to them that they were mistaken; but my voice was drowned in the tumult, and the stones began to rain like hail. I felt a pull at my cloak, and turning, saw Zénarde. She had followed me, and heard it all.

"It is useless," she said, in a quiet voice; "kill me now, M. le Vicomte."

I looked below, and saw them placing the improvised battering-ram against the door, and then I jumped down beside her.

"Not yet, Zénaïde!" I cried, with a break in

my voice, for I could not bear to look upon her pale and lovely face. "There may yet be a chance. Take one of my pistols, and let us find a refuge if we can."

I took her hand in mine and found that it did not even tremble, although as cold as death. Leading her, I found an upper room, and waited there to meet our fate. It was a moment of agony for both, and she clung to my arm like a child.

"M. le Vicomte," she faltered suddenly, while we waited in that quiet spot, "I blame myself; I should not have led you here. It is awful to die such a death."

I drew her closer to me and looked down upon her face so near my own.

"But we shall die together," I said softly, and our eyes meeting, I read the truth in hers. "Zénaïde," I whispered, "you know that I love you?"

"Yes," she murmured faintly, "I know it, Philippe; and still — we must die."

"Together, sweetheart," I replied, kissing her; "united in life and death."

And thus our troth was plighted. And then a new terror smote us; a tiny wreath of smoke came curling in at the open door.

"They have fired the house," Zénaïde said

quietly, raising her head from my breast, and looking at me with horror growing in her eyes.

I went out at the door and looked down the hall. The odor of burning was unmistakable. I could hear the crashing of the outer door and the roar of the mob below. The fire was in the rear, and I knew that the stragglers whom I had seen leaving the crowd in front had fired the wings. I could hear the crackle of flames, even above the tumult, and the blue smoke was creeping up in thin spiral waves.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MICHAEL'S REVENGE.

ZÉNAÏDE came and stood beside me, and we watched those blue wreaths increase until the foot of the staircase was clouded, and we had to draw back for a breath of air.

"Let us go to the window, Philippe," she said in that quiet tone which seemed to voice her despair. "It is horrible, but perhaps it is better than to perish by their hands or our own."

"Alas, my love!" I exclaimed hoarsely, "it is but a choice of evils, and how bitter it is to die at such a time! If it were not for you, I think I could face it cheerfully—I—"

She put her hand on my arm and looked up with a wonderful tenderness in her face.

"Remember your own words, Philippe," she said softly; "we can die together."

I clasped her in my arms, and we stood listening to the tumult below; the mob was loose, and the house was being searched. Their

cries of rage and triumph came up to us, and all the while the smoke increased. How long could it last? And which would find us first? A sudden noise at the other end of the hall startled us; doors were opened and closed, and an uneven step came rushing on. They were coming. We looked into each other's eyes. "Now, Philippe!" she whispered, touching my weapon.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*!" I cried, "how can I do it?"

"It is better," she said, her white face quivering; "you swore it, Philippe. Oh, my love, adieu!"

She kissed me of her own accord and then stepped back. "Be quick, Philippe!" she cried.

The footsteps were near at hand. Even in my agony, I listened; there was but one man. If she must die, her life should cost them dear. I made a sign to her, and kept my eyes upon the door; my pistol was ready cocked. The first rioter who crossed that threshold would be a dead man. At that instant I heard a voice, a familiar voice:—

"M. de Brousson! M. le Vicomte!" it called almost at the door; and in a moment Pierrot stood before us, — Pierrot, covered with dust and blood, but stolidly respectful still.

"The saints be praised!" he cried; "we had given you up for lost."

The relief was so great that at the first I had no words to utter. At the sound of a friendly French voice Zénaïde had broken down, and stood there quivering from head to foot.

"How came you here?" I exclaimed, at last.

"With the Boyar Ramodanofsky," Pierrot replied. "And we have not a moment to lose, M. le Vicomte; the house is burning in the kitchen wing. Come down as quickly as you can."

"The rioters!" gasped Zénaïde, looking at him in amazement.

"The boyar can get us through," Pierrot said; and then, to my astonishment, I noticed that he wore the full uniform of the Streltsi.

Some one else was coming along the hall, and he stood aside to let the new-comer enter. Zénaïde saw him before I did, and from her eyes I knew who it was. Feodor Sergheievitch came in as easily as if such scenes were his daily experiences. But at the sight of his daughter, he paused, looking at her strangely; and for the first time, I realized that he had not seen her since she was a child.

"It is your father, Zénaïde," I exclaimed.

"The image of her mother," he said, as if

to himself. Then, without another word, he lifted her in his arms. "Follow me, M. de Brousson," he said calmly; "the fire will cut off the stairs in five minutes."

And he went out with his daughter in his arms, Zénaïde looking over his shoulder at me with imploring eyes. He carried her as easily as he would have carried an infant, and led the way, Pierrot and I following closely. The hall was thick with smoke, and I saw why he had wasted no time in words. It was life or death, and I could not but admire his iron composure, even while I fretted that the task of protecting Zénaïde had been taken from me by one who had a better right. He took us towards the other side of the house and descended the stairs by the rooms that had been mademoiselle's. Every step brought us nearer to the howling demons below, and I saw Zénaïde's hands clutch his shoulders as if she doubted his ability to face the mob; but he never paused; down, down we went. Pierrot and I had drawn our swords, but both Feodor's arms were about his daughter, and his stern face set with a resolution that no peril could shake. We could hear the rioters breaking furniture and smashing glass, and now and then their voices rose in fierce profane contention over some cov-

eted spoil. They were crowding into this wing, for the fire was eating its way through the rest of the house, and even here the smoke was crawling in. Another turn, and we could see below. It was a wild scene. The contents of the rooms, smashed and heaped together, were being thrown into the hall, and a group of rioters were dragging out a cask of liquor from the cellar. Two or three brawny fellows were coming in at the door as the boyar advanced towards it. I tightened my grip on my sword, expecting that we should have to cut our way through; but Ramodanofsky swept on without hesitation, and they stood perplexed, not knowing what to do.

“Stand aside!” he thundered.

“Why so fast, master?” one of them exclaimed insolently.

“Hush!” cried another, plucking at his sleeve, “it is Lykof.”

“Stand aside, in the name of the Czar Ivan Alexeivitch!” exclaimed the disguised boyar; and to my surprise, they let us pass, although they stared angrily at me, as if uncertain of their recognition.

There were only a few stragglers in the court, and keeping close together, we followed Ramodanofsky to a low gate behind the wing that I

had never seen. It was already unfastened, and we passed out into a narrow and deserted alley. As soon as we were safely beyond the gate, the boyar placed Zénaïde on her feet and spoke a few words to her, which I did not hear; but I saw her glance up into his eyes with a look of awakening feeling. He drew her hand through his arm and walked on more slowly. Meanwhile, I had been reflecting upon the situation, and quickening my steps, I joined them.

"Have you a refuge selected, M. Ramodanofsky?" I asked.

"It is my intention, if possible, to reach the Kremlin, and place Zénaïde under the protection of the Czarevna Sophia," he replied with some hesitation.

"That is hardly possible now," I said at once. "Come to my quarters, monsieur; I think that they will scarcely be molested."

After a moment's thought, he assented.

"I believe you are right, M. le Vicomte," he said slowly, "although I think it possible to reach the Kremlin, the risk with Zénaïde with me is double, and it is hard to tell to what lengths they will go. My daughter and I will therefore gladly accept your invitation, M. de Brousson," he added, glancing at me

with keenly observant eyes, and the shadow of a smile about his lips.

"No more welcome guests will ever cross my threshold, monsieur," I said warmly, feeling the blood rise on my cheek at his tone, and noticing, too, Zénaïde's embarrassed eyes.

We were walking rapidly, for there was no time to loiter, and we went by the lanes and alleys, making a détour to avoid a party of rioters. On the way, Ramodanofsky questioned Zénaïde about the cause of our return to his house. I helped her to explain the circumstances of the escape, and our search for Mademoiselle Eudoxie.

"She is safe," Ramodanofsky said. "I found how matters were turning, and sent her to the Kremlin; she is under the protection of Sophia."

After a moment, he turned to me with more emotion in his face than I had ever seen there before.

"It is to you, then, M. le Vicomte," he said, "that I owe my daughter's life, as well as my own. I will not forget the debt."

Zénaïde was on his other side, but she glanced across at me, and, for the first time on that terrible day, a smile shone in her eyes. I think that he saw the look and read it, for he

was a keen observer; and I saw his expression change to one of deep gravity. Walking rapidly, it was not long before we reached my own door, and Pierrot, taking the lead, ushered us in. I conducted Zénaïde and her father to my sitting-room, and then went to order some food, for I was hungry myself, and felt sure that Zénaïde must be in need of some refreshment, if she could eat at all after our dreadful experience. Going to the lower hall, I called Pierrot, and gave him my orders to serve us as dainty a meal as he could with the means at hand. After concluding my instructions, I turned to go back to my guests; but seeing the closed door at the end of the hall, suddenly remembered Polotsky. It occurred to me in a flash that the man must be suffering if he had been forgotten there, and I went rapidly down the hall. My hand was on the latch, when Pierrot overtook me and plucked my sleeve.

"Do not go in there, M. le Vicomte!" he exclaimed, in a strange voice.

I looked around at him angrily; he did not attempt such interference as a rule. The fellow's honest face was pale, and as full of horror as if he had seen a specter.

"What is the matter with you, knave?" I asked, half angry, half amused, for there was

something in the frightened look on his usually stolid face which was absurd. "Have you attended to the wretch in here, or have you forgotten, and don't want me to know it?"

He still held my sleeve, staring at the door as if he expected Satan to appear.

"It does n't matter, my lord," he replied, in a low voice, "whether he is forgotten or not. He will never need any attention, except from the grave-digger."

I made an attempt to open the door, but he still held me back.

"How did it happen?" I asked sharply.
"Did he kill himself, or did —"

I stopped; I divined the truth, — Michael had wreaked his revenge, I saw it in my man's face.

"You rogue, you!" I exclaimed. "I ordered you to keep the fellow safe."

"M. le Vicomte," Pierrot replied, "you remember that I went to find you, believing your life to be in peril; when you sent me back I was too late. That Russian devil had accomplished his revenge and gone. I have not seen him since. The man was quite dead when I returned. It is not worth while to look at him. It makes me sick."

And the poor fellow turned away shuddering as I opened the door. The sight within turned

my stomach. There was a beam across the room, a little below the ceiling; and from this hung the corpse of Polotsky, suspended by a rope about his neck. A glance sufficed to tell me what had happened. The fire had evidently been raked down to a bed of coals, and the poker lay near at hand. The feet of the corpse were blackened, and both eyes had been put out. He had been tortured into eternity. I went out and shut the door, as sickened as Pierrot. This was a Russian vengeance. How bitter must have been the wrongs that had roused such hatred as this! I walked up and down the hall for a while, blaming myself for having left the wretch bound and helpless in my house. I did not regret his death nor pity him, but I revolted at the barbaric brutality visited upon a human being, and under my roof. I thought of the boyar in the upper room, and wondered how he would regard it, reflecting, however, that he was a hard man and had tasted the bitter suffering of exile and imprisonment, meted out by his own brother and this dead man. It was not likely that he would feel either pity or remorse. I knew that the Tartar was close under the skin of that stern-faced man, and it seemed to me almost impossible that he could be Zénaïde's father. Her

uncle, with all his fierce and evil traits, had possessed a grace of manner entirely foreign to Feodor.

It was some time before I could recover my equanimity sufficiently to go up to my guests. The horror of that lower room was possessing me almost as strongly as it did Pierrot. I felt too that I ought to leave the strangely reunited father and daughter together, to give them an opportunity to realize their relation and understand each other. And it was not until supper was ready that I entered the room to summon them to join me.

I found them sitting side by side, the boyar holding his daughter's hand and a new look on his rugged face, while in Zénaride's I saw the dawn of a beautiful affection, which stirred a feeling almost of jealousy in my breast. She told me afterwards that he had cast aside his stern manner, and told her briefly but tenderly the story of his short married life, and of her mother as a beautiful girl in France; of their love for each other, and their happiness in their little girl. He spoke with great feeling of his young wife's death and his own hard fate, and touched lightly and with much reserve on his half-brother's share in that past. In that hour of confidence Zénaride forgot her first impression

of the stern boyar, awaking to a new feeling of thankfulness that she was no longer an orphan.

I saw, as soon as I looked at them, that she did not now shrink from him as a stranger with perhaps all his brother's evil characteristics. There was something almost solemn in the picture which they made, the scarred and weather-beaten father and the young daughter, whose beauty was peculiarly pure and delicate, like that of some unsullied white flower. At my entrance, the boyar rose and thanked me again for rescuing his daughter, and there was a new and deep emotion in his voice, and his manner was much softened.

We were at supper, when I heard a voice at the door, and presently Pierrot returned with a troubled face. Fearing something that might alarm Zénaïde, I did not question him until afterwards, and then he told me that it was one of Von Gaden's servants. The poor fellow had come to me for protection, after hiding all day. The rioters had returned a second time and searched the doctor's house and his partner's, and finding Madame von Gaden, dragged her away with them. Von Gaden himself had not yet been taken; but pursuit was hot, for they believed that he had poisoned the late czar, and nothing but his blood would satisfy them.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MADAME VON GADEN.

FOR days it was impossible for Zénaïde to leave the house with safety. The Kremlin was virtually in the possession of the Streltsi, and every gate strongly guarded. The scenes of blood did not end with the first day. The czarina's brother, Peter Naryshkin, had been found in a house across the Moskva and brutally murdered, and they were clamoring for the life of Ivan Naryshkin and Dr. von Gaden. The Departments of Justice and Serfage had been attacked by the mob and rifled of their contents, the papers strewn to the winds, for it pleased the caprice of the soldiers to declare the people free. But after the first day, the leaders had checked the impetuosity of their men, and but few private houses were molested, and general pillage was not allowed. It was distinctly a mob of soldiers, and there was a certain discipline even in their riot. But as yet they did not permit the burial of the hor-

ribly mutilated bodies which had been lying in the Red Place since the morning of May 25th, and the czarina had to submit to the humiliation of allowing her guardian's dismembered remains to lie exposed in the public square.

Ramodanofsky went out freely in his character of Peter Lykof. He possessed considerable influence with the Streltsi, and had succeeded in completely concealing his relations with the hated nobility. It occurred to me that if the truth should be discovered at an unfavorable moment, he might be treated by the soldiers as a traitor, and even a spy. The event justified my fears. I had been to the Kremlin and seen Mademoiselle Eudoxie, assuring her of Zénaïde's safety; Mademoiselle and Madame von Gaden were concealed in the private apartments of the young Czarina Martha, the widow of Feodor, Sophia having rescued Von Gaden's wife from the mob, and hidden her in her sister-in-law's room. Meanwhile, a curious change had taken place in affairs of state. The young Czar Peter had been virtually deposed, and the czarina dowager, broken down with grief and trouble, made but a feeble resistance. I was shocked to see the change in her; she seemed utterly unnerved and unable to cope with the situation, while

the Czarevna Sophia was making all the appointments, filling the vacancies caused by death, and selecting her own councillors. All the woman's shrewdness and ability showed in the crisis. While she pretended to lament the atrocities of the riot, she was quick to profit by the opportunities they made for her success. She had acquired a thorough knowledge of public affairs during the illness of her brother, the Czar Feodor, when she had, in many instances, acted for him, and she showed her ability now in the selection of her advisers, Prince Basil Galitsyn, of course, standing foremost in her regard. It was patent to all that she was aiming at the regency, and we suspected at the crown, although she screened her motives behind her apparent affection for her blind brother, the Czarevitch Ivan. Peter's election being discredited, it was impossible for affairs to remain on their present footing. The two young princes would have to reign jointly, and that meant the regency of Sophia Alexeievna. It was an evil hour for the Naryshkins, and the prospects of the young Peter never looked more gloomy. Glancing back upon those days of blood, it seems impossible that no one should have foreseen the advent of the great czar; that every eye was absorbed by the subtlety of the

clever czarevna, never dreaming of the day of reckoning, when Peter should reclaim his own.

It was on the evening of the third day, when I had returned from the Kremlin, that Pierrot, who had been on duty constantly to guard Zénaïde, answered a gentle summons at the side door. I was in the lower hall at the time, and saw him admit two closely veiled women, followed by a young fellow, whom I recognized as one of the attendants of the imperial household. The foremost female figure was undoubtedly Mademoiselle Eudoxie.

"This was a risk, mademoiselle," I said smiling, as I held out my hand, at the same time looking beyond her at the veiled figure, which I did not know.

"I could not stay there any longer," mademoiselle exclaimed with a shudder. "It is too horrible. I seem to hear the shrieks of those poor murdered creatures all the time. Besides, I wanted to be with Zénaïde; I am not happy when I do not know that she is safe; and madame wanted to see you."

This surprised me, and I glanced inquiringly at the muffled form. Seeing my look, the stranger raised her veil, and I saw the face of Madame von Gaden, changed as I have scarcely ever seen a woman's face change in a few days.

She looked old with her pallor and the dark rings under her eyes. I divined her errand in a moment, and sending mademoiselle to Zénaïde, turned to the poor woman with as gentle a manner as I could command.

"Have you seen him?" she asked in a broken voice; "have you heard anything?"

Very tenderly I told her of my parting with her husband after our escape from his house.

"And you have never seen him since?" she exclaimed, pressing her hand to her heart.
"Where can he be?"

"Far away, I trust, madame," I replied gravely. "Let us not wish to see him until this frenzy is over. It is almost spent; it cannot last a great while now."

She shook her head. "Alas!" she said, "they will not be satisfied until they have his blood. I thought that they would have mine when they dragged me through the streets to the Kremlin. Nothing saved me but Sophia and the young Czarina Martha; she concealed me in her own room until now, when I could endure it no longer. Poor Jan Gutmensch was killed, in spite of the intercession of the princesses, you know, M. le Vicomte?"

"Let us hope that your good husband has escaped from Moscow," I said, reassuringly.

"I pray so," the poor woman replied brokenly. "But I hear their howls for his blood all the time. They were like the cries of wolves, M. de Brousson; they have less pity than the beasts."

"Yet, be of good cheer, madame," I said soothingly. "Your husband has evaded them so long, let us hope that he may still succeed. The hottest pursuit grows tardy after a while, and their patience will be soon exhausted."

She was eager enough to snatch at a straw of comfort, and quieted down under my soothing remonstrance. Presently she went up with me, and I sent mademoiselle and Zénaïde to comfort her. In a great degree I shared her anxiety, for the mob had made a point from the first to demand the death of Von Gaden. It seemed improbable that the Jew could successfully elude them, when not even the Czarina Natalia could protect her own brothers.

I went down again to find Pierrot, hoping to hear some reassuring tidings; but before I called him, I heard a light step on the stair, and Zénaïde was looking down upon me, her lovely face full of anxiety.

"What is it?" I exclaimed softly, reaching up until I touched her hand upon the balustrade.

"Has my father come yet, Philippe?" she asked. "I feel sure that he will have tidings for this poor woman. I cannot bear to see her so broken down."

"Alas, Zénaïde!" I replied gravely, "any news may be evil for her. They have never ceased to search for poor Von Gaden, and I have really little hope of his escape. It seems a miracle that he has avoided them so long."

"The wretches!" she exclaimed, the color mounting in her cheeks. "If I were czarina of all the Russias—" she paused, seeing a smile in my eyes.

"My love," I said smiling, "what would become of me? I felt abashed when I told the Boyar Ramodanofsky that I loved his daughter, and he has not replied to me yet. How could I sue for the white hand of an empress?"

She looked at me with her head a little on one side.

"If I were an empress, M. le Vicomte"—she began, but the opening of the outer door arrested the laughing words upon her lips, and we both turned startled glances at the stern countenance of the boyar. His keen eyes searched us for a moment, but he closed the door and advanced with a sober face.

"You have evil tidings, father," Zénaïde

exclaimed, her quick eye reading his clouded brow.

"Not for you, my child," he replied quietly; "but a sad thing has happened. We have lost a friend," he added, turning to me.

"Von Gaden?" I exclaimed at once.

The boyar bowed his head in assent.

"Alas!" exclaimed Zénaïde, "is he slain?"

"He and Ivan Naryshkin were taken to-day," Ramodanofsky replied. "The Streltsi came to the palace and demanded Ivan Naryshkin; the czarina resisted, until Sophia told her that his life must be sacrificed to save the others. He received the eucharist in the Church of the Savior beyond the Wicket, and Sophia gave him an image of the Virgin to hold. Poor Natalia Kirilovna went with him to the Golden Wicket, and there the Streltsi seized him and insulted him before her eyes. Meanwhile, Von Gaden had been arrested in disguise, begging for food; he has been three days in the woods without it. He and Naryshkin were both taken to the Constantine torture-room and subjected to excruciating agony. Ivan uttered not a word, but Von Gaden had already endured too much, and he made some sort of confession, the wild talk of a man in death agony. It availed nothing. They were dragged to the Red Place and

lifted on the points of the rioters' spears. Then their hands and feet were cut off, their bodies chopped in pieces and trampled in the dirt. Thus perished a benevolent physician."

"His poor wife!" cried Zénaïde; "who can tell her? She is here, father," she added; "she came to hear some tidings of him."

"You will have to tell her, Zénaïde," her father said, gravely.

At that moment we heard a step upon the stair, and looking up, saw madame standing just above us. Her robe was black, and the mantle about her head, and out of its shrouding folds showed a face like that of a corpse.

"She need not tell me," she said in a strange wild voice; "I heard it all. Let me die too! Let me go out and tear these ruffians with my hands and die battling with them! May they be torn limb from limb, and their wives and children left desolate, as I am desolate!"

She threw her hands over her head with a frantic gesture as she invoked the wrath of Heaven. Then she came down, her eyes staring out of her white face, yet seeming not to see us, or anything but the door. We thought her mad, and no doubt for the moment she was. Ramodanofsky, springing forward, caught her and held her back. She shrieked aloud and

struck at him with her fists, but he held her in a grip of iron. Mademoiselle Eudoxie came running at the sound of the screams, and Pierrot and the man who had attended her from the Kremlin. But in a moment it was over, and she fell across the boyar's arm in a deathlike swoon, the foam upon her lips. Very gently he lifted her and carried her up the stairs, followed by Zénaïde and mademoiselle, who were eager to minister to the poor, afflicted creature, so horribly bereaved.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A DESPERATE DEFENSE.

I STOOD in the lower hall with the two men. Pierrot addressed me at once in French.

"I have been talking with this fellow, M. le Vicomte," he said, in his deliberate way, "and I find that we may be in some danger. He belongs to the household of the czarevna, and knows a number of the soldiers. A report has spread that the Boyar Ramodanofsky is here, and they confuse this gentleman above stairs with the dead man. They never had any proof of the other's death, and this man seems to think that they are still thirsty for his blood. Then they have learned that you were a friend of Dr. von Gaden's, and that it was you who interfered to save mademoiselle."

I put a few questions in Russian to the court usher, and found that Pierrot had not exaggerated. If the rumors were true, the situation was serious; and if it was even suspected that Madame von Gaden was here, it might precipi-

tate an attack more determined than that on the Ramodanofsky house. I was sorely perplexed. It was at best extremely perilous to take the women through the streets, and at that hour, altogether too great a risk. Yet, if the house should be attacked, there would be no way of defending it. My nationality would not save me. I knew that the Danish resident, Butenant von Rosenbusch, had hardly escaped with his life, and he had done nothing to provoke the fury of the mob. If Ramodanofsky's identity was known, it would ruin rather than help us. However, no remedy suggested itself, and I saw no resource but to abide our fate and hope for the best. Sophia was beginning to gain control, and we could count upon her friendship and that of Galitsyn. Ramodanofsky had told me that a call would be issued for a general council for the purpose of legally electing Ivan and Peter czars of all the Russias, and declaring Sophia Alexeievna regent. This was the beginning, and a vigorous government once organized under the czarevna, I had no doubt that she could control the insurrection, although the indemnity demanded by the Streltsi was likely to impoverish the imperial exchequer.

I told Pierrot to secure the house carefully, and use all precaution, and then went to hear

tidings of madame's condition. Mademoiselle Eudoxie came out of the room where they had carried her, and told the boyar and me that she had recovered consciousness, and seemed grateful for their care; clinging to Zénaïde for consolation, since some words of hers had brought the relief of tears to the poor, half-crazed woman.

Ramodanofsky and I were left alone, and I was bringing another light to put on the table, when he suddenly rose and went to the window. I looked at him in astonishment, for he was not a man of rapid movements. After a glance out, he silently signaled to me to join him. As I approached, he stood aside and pointed down into the street. A strange spectacle met my astonished gaze. In the darkness, I could just distinguish the crowd of people that were silently forming in a circle about the house, as if in fear of being disappointed of their anticipated prey. The boyar and I looked at each other in silence; I saw the fire of the warrior burning in his eyes, but my thoughts were all for the three helpless women in the inner room.

"You must keep them here, M. Ramodanofsky," I said quickly, "until I send the man below to the Kremlin for help if it can be had."

"I fear I cannot keep them now," he rejoined with perfect composure, although I saw his face twitch; "they suspect that I am not one of them. If they think me a traitor to their cause," he laughed harshly, "an hour from now you will not recognize the fragments of my remains."

"*Ma foi!*!" I cried passionately, "how can you jest? Your daughter, man, your daughter!"

A violent emotion convulsed his features.

"I was mad to come here to-night," he said, "stark, staring mad," and with that he went to the window, calling out to them that he must speak.

I did not pause to hear more, but rushed down the stairs just as a thundering blow fell on the door, summoning us to surrender. Pierrot and the other man were in the hall, taken by surprise.

"Quick!" I cried, "the back door! Pierrot, watch here and defend the way, and you," I said to the other, "must get out in the alley and run to the Kremlin. Tell the Czarevna Sophia that these hounds will murder the Boyar Feodor Sergheievitch Ramodanofsky and the Vicomte de Brousson."

He was glad enough to look for an escape, and ran with me through the kitchen. The door

was secured by two stout wooden bars, and I had lifted one from its sockets and had my hand on the other, when a sudden uproar without told me that it was too late. I replaced the bar, surrendering that last hope with a sickened heart. Then I ran back into the hall, just in time to see the outer door yield and the rioters pour into the entry. Pierrot was borne back into a lower room, and the way was unobstructed. With a yell of triumph, they came on. The stairs were high and narrow, and with a bound I reached them, and drawing my pistol, stood across their path. For an instant the tide was stayed, and the ringleaders halted; but the crowd behind, pushing into the narrow hall, sent them forward again. As they came up the first steps I fired twice, and two ruffians falling on top of each other, there was another pause. This gave me time to draw my sword; in another moment one of the leaders fell before me. Few men in France cared to measure swords with me, and certainly few would have dared upon that narrow stair. The rioters began to howl like baffled animals, and I kept the stair, but it could not be for long. I heard Ramodanofsky coming, and he joined me; but the sight of him drove them beyond the limit of fear.

"Traitor!" they bellowed; "a liar! a disguised aristocrat! down with him!"

And they poured up the staircase until it shook beneath their weight. I fought in that moment as I never fought before, and two more devils fell, before a blow from a spear stunned me, and I was borne down and trampled under foot. All the rest was lost in the blackness of unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XXX.

A SOLEMN BETROTHAL.

WHEN I came to myself again, I was lying on a couch, and the first eyes that I met were the tearful ones of Zénaïde, for she was standing beside me. For the moment, my mind was too confused to recall anything that had happened, and I looked wonderingly from her face to Pierrot, who stood at the foot of my couch, his head tied up so that one eye was obscured. Then, as through a mist, I saw Mademoiselle Eudoxie holding a bandage, while a strange man finished binding my arm.

“Where am I?” I murmured faintly, and at the moment, mademoiselle standing back, I saw the short, ill-proportioned figure and large head of the great czarevna. Then my mind cleared, and I glanced about me, and beheld the death-like face of Ramodanofsky. He was stretched upon another couch, and even in my first bewil-

derment, I knew that he was dying. Zénaïde was standing between us, her sweet face full of pain. Prince Galitsyn sat on the other side of the boyar, holding his hand and listening to him. The full recollection of the horrible scene swept over me, and I looked up into Zénaïde's blue eyes.

"How were you saved?" I asked.

The czarevna answered me. "Tidings came to us, M. le Vicomte," she said, "and Prince Galitsyn arrived here in time to beat back the rabble and save Zénaïde Feodorovna and the other women. It was a band of Streltsi infuriated because Ramodanofsky had deceived them into believing him to be one of themselves; they fancied that he had been playing the part of a spy."

"And your Highness came also?" I said, wondering.

"I came to protect you, M. le Vicomte, as the envoy of the King of France," she replied.

At the sound of my voice, Ramodanofsky turned his eyes in our direction, and I heard him ask the physician if I would recover, receiving an affirmative answer.

Sophia turned to him now, with an unusual kindness in her manner.

"You must recover also, Feodor Sergheie-

vitch," she said cheerfully; "we cannot afford to lose a newly-found subject."

The boyar looked at her sadly, and evidently made a strong effort to speak.

"It is too late, your highness," he said; "my life was not worth much at best, for it has been spent in prison and in exile until my strength was broken and my hopes were dashed forever. I had but the fragment to offer you, and that has been sacrificed."

Sophia's face changed. She showed, in that moment, more feeling than I had believed that she possessed.

"It is my regret, Feodor Sergheievitch," she said kindly, "that you should have suffered this injustice; it was my intention to make some reparation."

He looked at her intently, and those stern eyes of his glowed in his white face.

"Sophia Alexeievna," he said solemnly, "you are called to a high trust, and I charge you, never send a man to exile or to prison without being absolutely convinced of his guilt. It is a cruel thing—a cruel thing. I look back upon my blasted life and see no light."

He spoke with passionate feeling, and Galitsyn, bending over, touched his hand with mute sympathy. Zénaïde was kneeling beside the

couch, her face hidden in his robe. The dying man looked down upon her golden head, and an expression of pain crossed his features; then looking up, his eyes met mine.

"M. le Vicomte," he said, his voice very weak now, "I remember your suit, and with the czarevna's permission I will intrust my daughter to your keeping."

I saw Sophia start, and Galitsyn looked up quickly. I was stretched there helpless, unable to rise, but I looked back at the boyar.

"I will prove worthy of your trust, so help me Heaven!" I said firmly.

Ramodanofsky read Sophia's thoughts.

"Gracious lady," he said, making a strong effort to speak, "I know that Zénaïde, as the heiress of my estates, should be your ward, her hand at your disposal; but it is my desire that she shall wed Philippe de Brousson, one of her mother's countrymen. He has signified his willingness to accept her hand without any dower but my wife's estate in France. In her name, I surrender to the czar the lands and estates in Russia, asking only your permission that she shall marry as I desire."

It had cost him dear to speak, and he fell back with a gasp. Sophia was not without sympathy, and she was also keen enough to see

the advantage of the sudden accession of wealth in the impoverished treasury. She laid her hand kindly on Zénaïde's bowed head.

"Rest in peace, Feodor Sergheievitch," she said; "I will grant your request. The Vicomte is my friend, and Zénaïde shall be his wife."

"I thank you," the dying man said faintly, and his head fell back.

The physician bent over him and administered a restorative, and he opened his eyes again; but this time they sought only his daughter, who was clinging to his arm and weeping.

"Farewell, Zénaïde," he said, in a voice of strange tenderness, "found so late and lost so soon! Weep not for me, my child; life has had little sweetness, and perhaps it is best so."

Mademoiselle Eudoxie was kneeling at the foot of his couch and praying, and he looked at her and smiled.

"The end is near," he murmured faintly, looking calmly at us in farewell; "the end — of a — broken life — My soul —"

He spoke no more, and a moment later, Prince Galitsyn leaned over him and made the sign of the cross on his white forehead.

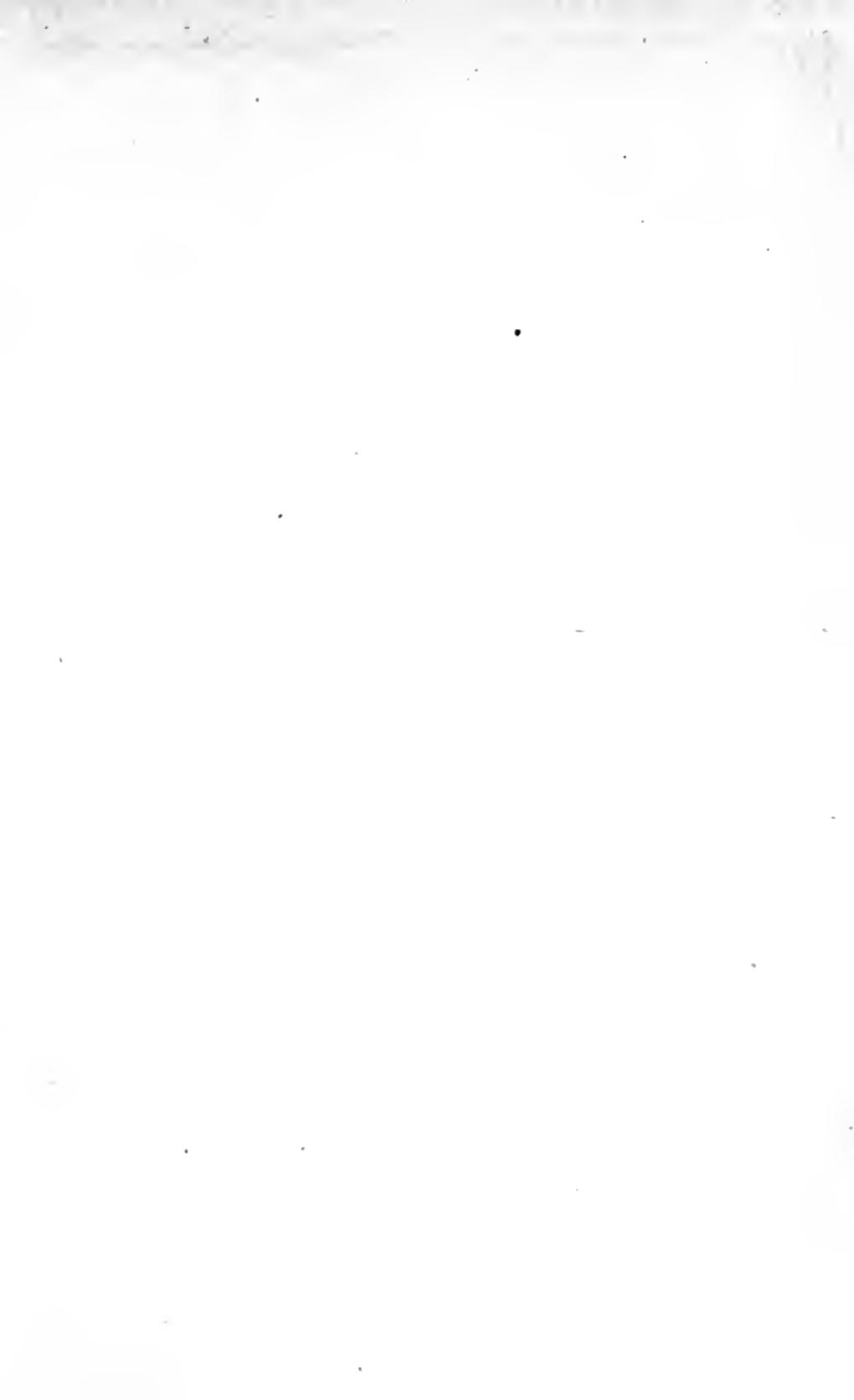
The stern spirit had passed quietly into eternity.

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My injuries kept me a prisoner in my room during the weeks that followed. I was faithfully nursed by Mademoiselle Eudoxie and Pierrot. Zénaïde was under Sophia's protection in the Kremlin. I saw nothing of the scenes of those exciting days, — the pacification of the Streltsi, the coronation of Peter and Ivan, and the declaration of the regency of Sophia Alexeievna. The new government was installed, and the city was comparatively quiet again, when I was well enough to return to France. I was anxious to claim the fulfillment of the regent's promise before she had time to regret it, and pressed my affairs to an early settlement. One summer morning, a small party assembled in the Cathedral of St. Michael the Archangel to witness my marriage to Zénaïde Feodorovna, the czarevna and Prince Galitsyn representing the bride's guardians. And I took my fair young wife back to her mother's country, followed by faithful Mademoiselle Eudoxie, and by Pierrot, whose face was no longer stolid, but radiant with joy at the thought of returning to his own beloved land, where we all found happiness and repose.

The flowers in the old garden of the Tour de Brousson bloomed with a new beauty to welcome the young mistress, who rejoiced in the tranquillity of the château with its terraces and its roses glorified by the sunshine of France.





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